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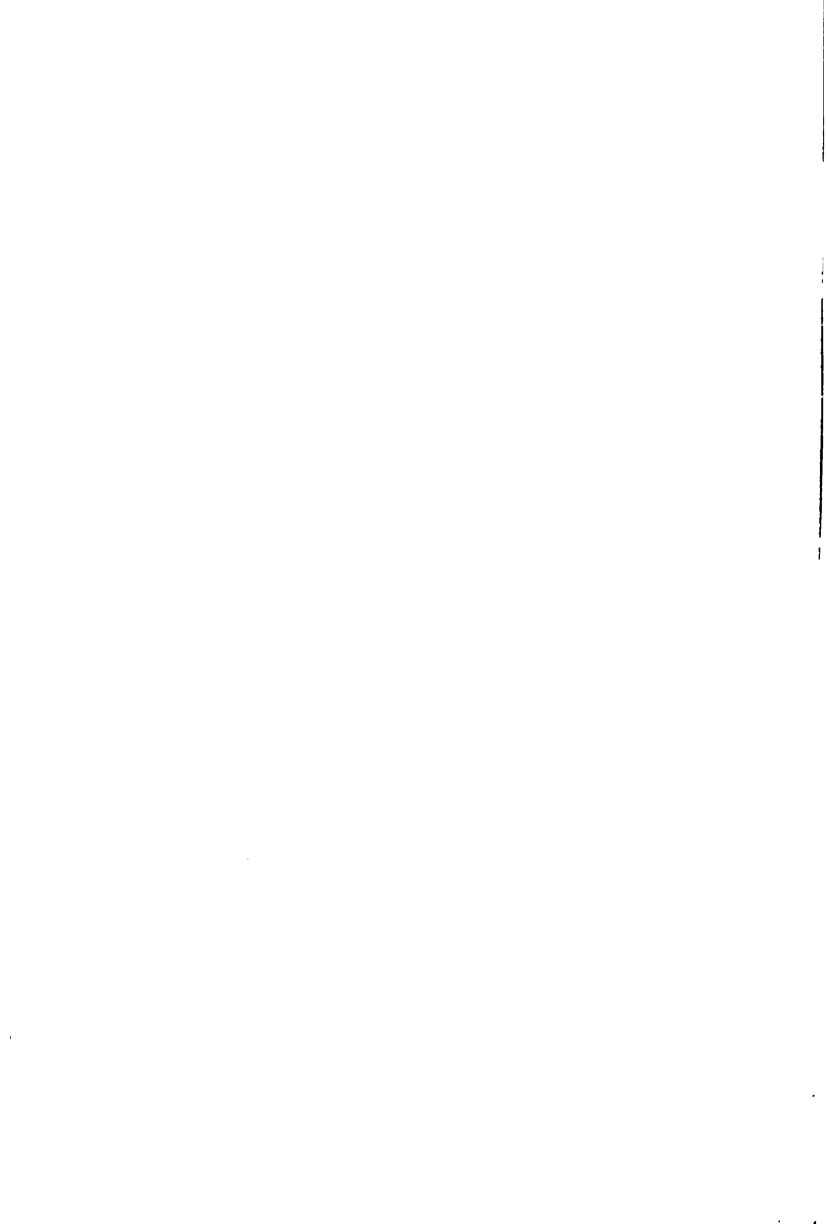
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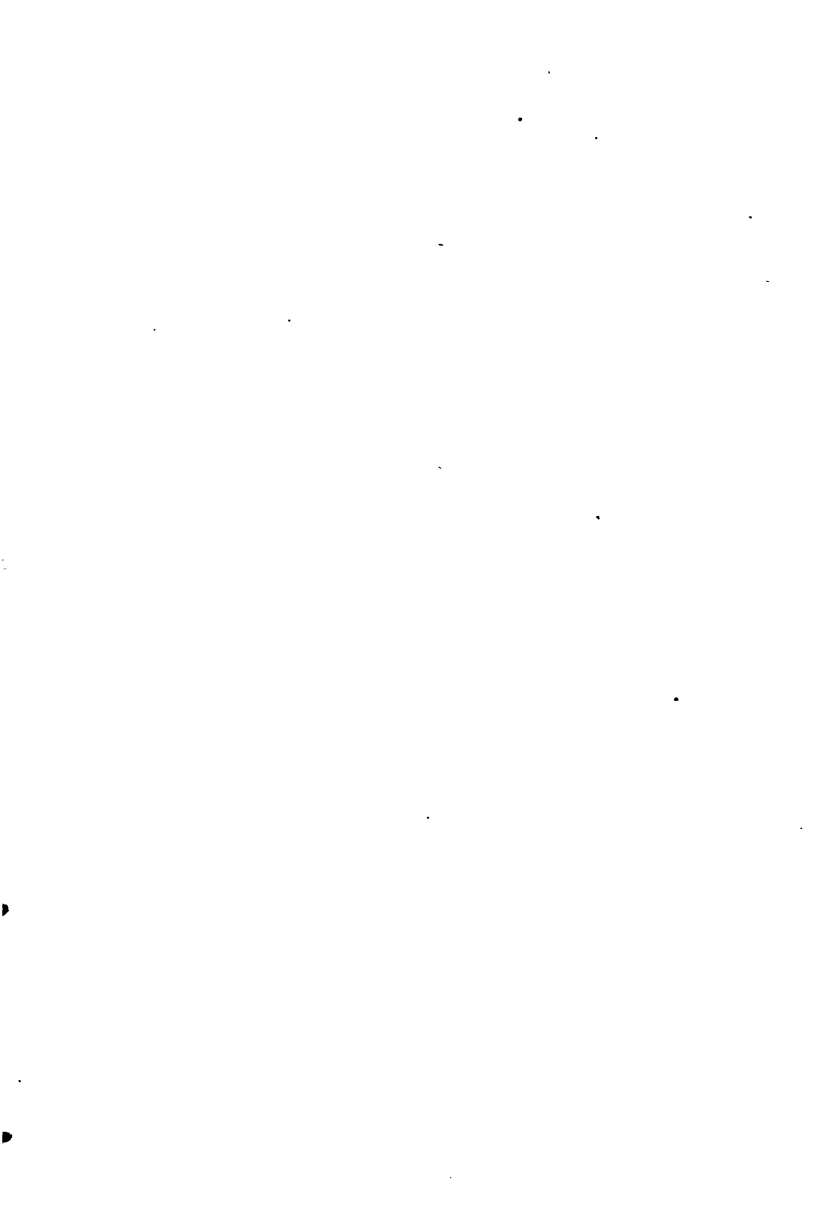
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LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP.

CHAPTER I.

THE great currents of business and pleasure were setting strongly up and down the Strand, with their accustomed even roar, on a bright April morning, some twenty years ago. The season was at its prime. Half-past eleven had chimed from St. Martin's, and the relieved guard of Blues had turned into Waterloo Place on their homeward way to Albany Street.

In one of the best rooms in Morley's Hotel looking on Trafalgar Square, an elaborate breakfast was laid out, including, among other accessories of a later meal, a bottle of cognac, while two or three of soda-water lay modestly on their sides in the cavity of the sideboard.

Thrown back on a sofa, near an open window, with one heel resting on the back of a chair, sat a young man, of perhaps two or three and twenty, in a Persian silk dressing-gown, embroidered slippers, richly-worked smoking-cap, and

all the appliances of a most luxurious morning *dishabille*. One of his small white hands held a newspaper, the other supported his head—a very handsome head! small, with delicate ears, curly black hair, and bright, happy dark eyes, a trifle too bead-like, perhaps. Downy mustaches darkened his upper lip, without concealing the red, youthful, undecided mouth, slightly apart, with a pleasant smile.

A staid, solemn, well-dressed man was standing, soda-water bottle in hand, at the opposite side of the breakfast-table.

“Hold hard, Simmons,” said the loungee, “before you open that accusing bottle—I want to impress upon you that I drink it in consequence of present heat—not past excess—you feel convinced, Simmons?”

“Yes, Sir Frederic.”

“And—hold hard again—get me some claret, and remove the brandy out of sight—not out of reach, mind you! that fellow Neville will be here directly, and he’ll sing out for it. Any letters for him?”

“Yes, Sir Frederic.”

“Hand them over.”

The valet presented a salver, on which lay half-a-dozen notes and three large letters; these Sir Frederic picked out.

“Get me the claret, Sim;”—the valet vanished.

"Hum," said the young exquisite; "these two are duns, or circulars, and this—oh! this must be from our sovereign lord and brother. 'Gad, how Neville will swear! I wish he had a good old father instead of crabbed, sanctified half-brother! Neville is a capital fellow! he'd be a first-rate fellow, if—"

We are not destined to know why, at present, for the door was burst open, and a magnificent individual appeared; a tall, broad-shouldered man, in dark-blue uniform, blazing with gold, and lighted here and there with gleams of crimson; spurs jangling, sabre rattling, he strode into the room like an impersonation of the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war." Without a word he dashed aside his hot Hussar pelisse and shako, disclosing a sun-burnt, broad-browed face, a somewhat heavy jaw, large, clear, dark-gray eyes, wavy, yellow-brown hair, and long mustaches, a shade more tawny.

"How goes it, Compton?" were his first words. "Where's the brandy?" alas! were the second.

"Try some claret instead," returned Sir Frederic; "it will cool you better—I am just going to have some."

"No, no! Brandy steadies you more, and it is infernally hot! My hand shakes like a girl's! Oh, no!" in answer to a look from his friend, "you know I never drink, and it would take a

hogshead to bowl me over if I did. But Her Majesty is an early bird, God bless her! and I had scarce time after we broke up for a bath, and to scramble into uniform, before we were paraded and off at full trot to the Station—now—any letters?”

“Here you are,” was the ungrammatical reply of his friend, “I have been speculating upon them while waiting for you,” and he tossed over the three large ones.

Neville meantime had compounded a mixture of brandy, soda-water, and ice in a huge tumbler, and drained it off thirstily, setting it down with a deep sigh of enjoyment; he took them, and selecting one, looked intently at it on all sides; then glancing up with a sudden, frank smile, which brightened his rather stern face marvellously, said—

“’Gad! I never was in such a funk, either at Meerut or Lucknow, as at the sight of this confoundedly clear, accurate penmanship. Don’t laugh, Compton! Here goes!” and the seal was broken.

A few minutes’ silence, while Captain Neville’s eye ran hastily over the even lines. Gradually the strong jaw closed with a fierce expression, and the hand, which had slowly pulled his long mustaches, dropped and clenched by his side. Then he looked up, and said quietly—

“It’s no go, Compton.”

"The devil it is!" replied that ingenious youth.
"What the deuce will you do?"

"Sell out," was the rejoinder.

"And then?"

"Mercury, the god of vagabonds, alone knows," returned Neville, with a bitter laugh.
"I am fit for little but a barrack; yet I tell you what, Compton, I must eat and get cool, and think, man, for out of this mess I *must* find a way."

He rang the bell, and on the appearance of a waiter asked for his man.

"He is in your room, sir."

"Go on with your breakfast; I'll be with you directly," said the Captain, and vanished.

Sir Frederic drew a chair to the table and shook his head, made a deep incision into a *pâte de Strasbourg* and transferred a portion of it to his plate, then shook his head again, and, holding his knife and fork inactive, fell into deep thought.

In a few minutes Neville re-entered, looking fresher, having doffed the glories of his uniform for a dressing-gown, etc., like those of his companion, only more subdued in color.

Without exchanging many words, he commenced a serious onslaught on the good things before him, and while thus engaged, an explanatory word or two. Neville was a captain in the —th Hussars, the cadet of an old but decayed

north-country race. The letter we have seen him read was from his half-brother—the son of his father's first marriage with the daughter of a city magnate—whose fortune had propped up the house of Neville. He had inherited his mother's share in the famous banking-house of Foster & Co., and also the father's estates. He was a cool, shrewd man of business, and his shrewdness was at once strengthened and regulated by a certain sombre, "puritanical" turn of mind, which suited well with his narrow but deep intelligence. Indeed, he possessed more of the traditional "roundhead" characteristics—stern resolve and unyielding conviction—than is often found in this pliant age.

Guy, our friend, now deep in the Strasbourg pie, was, as I have said, of a different stamp, though not without a family likeness. His mother was a bright coquette, noble and penniless, with warmer blood in her veins than that which flowed strong but slow through those of the Cumberland Nevilles; so, in addition to a certain tenacity of purpose, Guy had a strong dash of passion and perversity—troublesome inmates for a soldier of fortune.

Now, his weakness was not wine nor women; though he had his love affairs—mere trifles—he never cared sentimentally for any one, it was the love of gambling which was too strong for him. And he was long a keen and a successful game-

ster, at first within tolerable bounds, latterly, especially since his luck turned somewhat against him, he had gone deeper and deeper, and now, having put off all other creditors as long as he could, in order to meet his debts of honor, and his last hope cut off by his brother's refusal to assist him, he felt almost stunned by the sudden pressure with which the knowledge that he owed nearly three thousand pounds weighed upon him. Five hundred he must pay before seven days were over, and all he had to pay it with was the price of his commission—of his gay jacket, his horses, and a few personalities. These once gone, "Othello's occupation would be o'er;" the future a "slough of despond." To what could he turn?

Nevertheless he had strong nerve and a stout heart left; besides, he was not yet thirty, so he ate to strengthen himself, that he might fight his way out of the corner into which he was hemmed.

His friend, Sir Frederic Compton, was lieutenant in his regiment—rich, and gay, and generous—beloved by all—a trifle wild, but that was only more endearing. The sole drawback to his sunny lot was the fact that his father had decreed by his will that the heir to his broad Devonshire lands and Cornwall mines should not be of age till he was five-and-twenty, till which time he was under the severe but loving guardianship of a maternal grandfather, a grand old city Cræsus.

As if this was not bother enough, the grandfather's heart was set on marrying the young baronet before he was out of leading-strings ; and, kind, busy, old man, to save the boy trouble, had found a wife for him—a ward of his own—to whom no reasonable man could make any objection. But boys, and girls too, are ever rebellious.

Neville and Compton had become known to each other previous to the latter joining the —th Hussars, through the business connection of old Mr. Foster (Sir Frederic's grandfather) and Neville's brother, who constituted the Co. in the famous establishment of Foster & Co., and Guy had been at once the young baronet's "fides Achates," and, notwithstanding his own errors, his mentor.

By this time the first edge of appetite is blunted, and the two young men began to talk.

Said Sir Frederic, kindly, "Try the *fratello* once more, old boy?"

"Not to save my soul," returned Neville, fiercely ; "besides, I have no right—we never were friends, and—" a momentary pause—"I have no choice—I have been thinking while I eat. I must speak to Cox's people about my commission, to-morrow, then think of the future afterwards."

"Don't be in such a hurry, for God's sake.

Look here, I could easily raise you seven or eight hundred by my name, and that would stave off matters for awhile, and—”

“How am I to repay you? It would come to the same in the end. My commission must go. A thousand thanks to you, Fred, all the same. You *are* a good fellow! No, no! the sooner I make the wrench and disappear the better, or I'll be going deeper in the mire. I must vow against cards, dice, betting, everything, or I'll end by being croupier or billiard-marker in some hell, by Jove! Talk of something else—yourself—what are you going to do to-night?”

Sir Frederic looked at his friend, and saw he had better humor him, so he grumbled out, “Such a sell, but I must do it!—Another slice of ham, Neville?—Grandpapa is in a worse fidget than ever to have me tied to that heiress he has been saving up for me, and to-night she is to be trotted out for my inspection at a demi-semi sort of a juvenile party in St. John's Wood—an awfully slow place. The man of the house is a chum of the revered grandfather—a mighty man on 'Change. I have dined there at magnificent spreads; but oh! so heavy. However, I have promised to go. It will keep the old gentleman quiet awhile. I wish you'd come with me, Neville?”

“Pshaw!” said that gentleman, courteously. “But who is this girl, and why is your grand-

father so anxious to marry you to her? You are rich enough."

"Why yes! But you see he has a mania for landed property, and she has about a thousand a year, almost in a ring fence, lying right between my Devonshire and Cornwall estates. Then her father was a sworn ally of the old governor's; his correspondent at New Orleans for centuries. Ultimately, he came over here, bought this property, invested his little savings, doubled them (I dare say she has thirty or forty thousand in the funds), brought up his only child in a half-savage, half-philosophic manner, and left her a ward of my granddad's. I suppose she is about eighteen or nineteen now. He says she is handsome—black eyes, and all that sort of thing. Mother a darkie, probably! Now I admire blondes; besides," he added, feelingly, "it is cruel to take a fellow's freedom from him just as he begins to enjoy it, and I can't be bored with any other woman now but *Totums*. *Totums* is such a nice, bright, pleasant little thing."

"That's all very well; but don't you get into any mischief with Miss *Totums*," said Neville gravely.

The young lady in question was a distinguished member of a distinguished ballet, and famed for a succession of rapid pirouettes on the extreme point of her right great toe, which had gained for her the fond but familiar

appellation of "Teetotum," abbreviated as above.

"Oh, I'll take care," said Sir Frederic. Then, after a moment's thought, he exclaimed, with sudden energy—

"Neville, I have the primest idea—Help yourself and me! Make love to the heiress—marry her—get the tin—reform your ways—wind up in high respectability—brother's blessing—virtue rewarded—eh?"

"Pshaw!" said Neville again.

"Why not?" persisted the young Baronet. "You are older than I am—have sown more wild oats. You are a good fellow; not averse to matrimony—would make her a deuced deal better husband than nine tenths of those among whom she will probably marry! Now, *do* think, my boy! It is not every day I have so bright an idea!"

"Compton," returned his friend, speaking slowly, "you are ridiculous."

"That's right—take your time, old fellow," said the other gleefully. "It's just the thing for you. Come with me to the tea-fight. Go in and win. If she chooses to prefer you (and of course she will, if you make love to her and I don't), my grandfather cannot blame me."

"'Gad! if she is a darkie, all the cash in Christendom will not make up for it," cried Neville, half carried away by his friend's enthusiasm.

"But if not, if she is a nice girl, by Jove! it might be a grand throw. Yet to owe everything to a wife is to play rather second fiddle? Eh, Compton?"

"Pooh! nonsense! Your fine old name and social standing will be a grand feather in the eyes of a New Orleans girl. I wonder does she drawl her words through her nose—that would be dreadful."

"Compton," said Neville thoughtfully, "I'll go with you this evening; though, by heavens, I feel ashamed of myself. I feel like a common adventurer, by George! and no gentleman."

"Don't talk like an idiot. You are all right. You try to get up the steam, and fall in love with her. Make her very happy, and nurse the estate, and all that sort of thing. By and by I'll marry some pretty blonde, and we will be first-rate neighbors, fit 'to point a moral, or adorn a tale.'"

Neville rose from table, and paced the room two or three times, took another tumbler of soda-water—this time without brandy—and ultimately said—

"There is no harm in having a look. I will go with you, Compton."

"Of course, you will be reasonable," returned his friend. "I dare say she is a charming, fresh creature, utterly free from knowledge of the world. She has been at school with some aw-

ful old woman at St. John's Wood for the last year and a half, I believe ; and you are just the sort of a Don to want the *first* of a woman's heart. So you are all right, if some fascinating drawing-master or music-master has not been before you," he added, with a touch of mischief.

"What right have I to look for the cream of anything?" said Neville, with some bitterness. "I wish—but why talk of wishes? Where shall we meet?"

"Oh, here, here," returned the Baronet. "And, Neville, do hear me. If you want to play this, or any game, successfully, you must have your wits clear. So let me lend you the seven hundred, and you can pay me when you sell your commission, or—marry."

"Hum! a pretty way to spend the poor girl's money."

"If I know anything of women," said the young Lieutenant, with a pretty air of conceit, "she will think it well spent if you love her, and show her attention."

"Suppose she is a woman who will talk of *my* house, and *my* horses? Eh, Compton?"

"By Jove! there are few would try that game with you, I fancy."

"God knows! What's her name all this time?"

"Marie Delvigne."

"French?"

"No. South American."

"Well! I'll have a look."

"We meet, then, here at dinner. Sharp seven.
So good morning, and success."

Sir Frederic nodded to his friend, and left the room.

CHAPTER II.

NEVILLE was not punctual, however, and it was nine o'clock before the friends were *en route* for the festive scene.

"I wonder what new vagary my grandfather was up to to-day," said Sir Frederic Compton, as they began to get clear of the noisier streets. "The old boy was three times at the hotel this afternoon; had not long left when I returned, and said he'd have waited longer, only he had to start for Paris by the night mail, so there will be an impediment the less to our scheme to-night."

"Ours? Say yours," returned Neville.

"Well, mine, if you will; but I dare say that stupid waiter did not give me the right message, and Simmons was out; he so seldom asks leave of absence, that I let him go."

"Some men can't say no," growled Neville.

"Then they must be pleasant fellows," said his good-humored companion. "Don't be down-hearted! You are on the road to love and riches. 'Nothing venture, nothing have!' Here we are!"

Mrs. Coleman's reception had progressed to a

culminating point of success when our friends reached Saratoga Lodge, St. John's Wood, a substantial house, substantially furnished, with a wide entrance and handsome rooms. Those for reception were all on the lower floor, and the hall ended in a conservatory of tolerable dimensions, prettily lit up, and well calculated for flirting.

The entrance of our Hussars sent a faint sort of sensation, down or up, through the fat and dignified hostess to the insignificant French teacher—asked in deference to the heiress's whim of friendship. The Baronet's air of fashion, and the soldierly bearing of his companion, were alike superior to the common standard of Saratoga Lodge. Sir Frederic, according to his genial habit, was soon perfectly at home with his hostess, whose soul he satisfied with compliments; while Neville listened with a half-suppressed smile.

After hearing Sir Frederic's explanation of Mr. Foster's absence, and pronouncing a warm eulogium upon his character and merits, Mrs. Coleman led her guests to the dancing-room, where the company, having gyrated madly for half an hour in a giddy waltz, were now completing the performance by trailing in couples, with solemn absurdity, round and round the room. Two or three boys in jackets, and half a dozen prim little girls bristling with flounces,

entitled the gathering to the name of a juvenile party. Through these conflicting couples did Mrs. Coleman wind her devious course, followed by Sir Frederic and Neville, in Indian file.

"You're nearly across the Rubicon now," whispered the former. "Can you dance?"

"I *have* danced," replied Neville, "but not for years. Must I?"

"Must! Most imperatively."

Mrs. Coleman paused here before a pretty group of three young girls. One, fair, tall, handsome, with full, light, languishing blue eyes, was sitting in a window-seat, beside a slight, timid, quiet-looking brunette, whose unobtrusive paleness scarce justifies an appellation which always conveys the idea of brilliancy; at the other side of the "belle blonde," and bending to speak to her, while the crimson drapery of the window-curtain formed a very effective background, stood the third,—tall and slight, but round and pliant, with a soft color mantling through her clear, brown-fair cheek, and a half smile trembling on her rosy, kindly lips. Her own glossy dark hair was plaited into a coronet, but no other ornament interfered with the graceful outline of her head. A snowy cloud of white muslin seemed to Neville's rather nervous vision to float about her indistinctly, save that certain easy folds were gathered from the creamy, sloping shoulders by a sash of black velvet to

her waist, and among them rested a bouquet of fragrant flowers. She turned to Mrs. Coleman as she approached, with an indefinable expression of joyous life—an expression which our neighbors' word "*spirituel*" can alone convey; and then her eyes met Neville's, her color deepened, and her bright glance involuntarily drooped.

"Sir Frederic Compton—Captain Neville," said the hostess. "Miss Delvigne—Miss Weston."

The gentlemen bowed.

"Allow me the honor of the next galop," said Sir Frederic, with prompt decision, addressing the fair beauty.

The lady at once graciously assented.

"Will you dance with me?" said Neville, to *his* bright particular star, unconscious earnestness rendering his deep tones less steady than usual, and feeling a marvellous attraction to the fair girl he addressed. "If," he thought, "fortune is to come to me in such a guise, I am the luckiest fellow on the globe."

Neville was not a ladies' man, and knew nothing at all of gay, innocent young girls; nor could Miss Redoubt's shyest pupil feel more ill at ease under the awful inspection of Madame Pirouette, the treble-x-dancing mistress, than did this bold Dragoon, as he thought, "What shall I say? How can I tell her that she is

a beautiful darling, and I wish myself an Earl, with £50,000 a year, for her sake?"

Meantime Marie Delvigne was stealing shy glances at her stalwart admirer, to her a totally new specimen of mankind. Hitherto her experience had been limited to long-haired professors, more or less severe, while school life had proved somewhat tame, lonely, and unsympathetic; nevertheless she was enjoying that glorious springtime when "the light that surrounds us is all from within."

"What is it to be?" said Neville, after an uncertain pause. "I ought," he continued, plucking up courage, "to warn you that, having been little in civilized life, I shall make but an indifferent partner."

"How?" asked Miss Delvigne, looking up at him with frank curiosity. "What are you, then—a soldier?"

"Yes," returned Neville.

"I am glad! I never met an English soldier before. But why are you in these clothes?"

"You would not have me appear in uniform?"

"Yes; it must be prettier than this costume."

"Well, perhaps so! But shall we begin? Promise you will be lenient to my errors."

A bright glance and smile, and they started. The music was well marked. Neville had sufficient ear to get on tolerably; and moving rapidly to the inspiring strains of a good band, with

a lithe soft figure in your arms, and a pair of bright eyes sometimes glancing up to yours, is not an unpleasant mode of advancing one's fortunes.

"But you do very well indeed," said Neville's fair partner, as they paused for breath after a long-continued turn.

Her easy tone reassured Neville, and he replied :

"Having succeeded so far, I fear to peril the reputation I have gained,—and you must be tired. I feel your hand trembling,"—he half involuntarily pressed it to his side. "It is hot, too. Let us go into the conservatory, or get an ice, or something;" and with a vague idea that he must keep out of Mrs. Coleman's way, he led his partner to the conservatory.

The subdued light, the fragrance, the stillness, the distant music, made up a delicious atmosphere.

"This is pleasanter than all that row," said Neville, complaisantly. "Sit here, Miss Delvigne. You look like a white blossom yourself, with that background of green leaves."

"Do I? What a charming idea! And where have you been if you have not been much in civilized life?"

There was an indescribable charm of innocent boldness, of frank, fearless equality in her manner that delighted Neville. Though refined and

gentle, it was so fresh and so unconventional, that he thought within himself, "I never dreamed those Southerners could turn out such a woman. I could feel more comfortable and at home if I was not so desperately inclined to kiss her when she looks into my eyes."

"Well," said he aloud, "I have been a good deal out of England—in India, at the Cape, and out-of-the-way places. And how do you like parties, and dancing, and all this sort of thing?"

"Very much indeed: but I like sitting in this pretty, quiet place, and feeling I shall be out of school for another hour or two, almost better."

"You don't like school, then?"

"No, indeed! Did you like being at school?"

"Yes—no," returned Neville, hesitatingly. "I wish I was there once more," he concluded, with a sigh and a smile.

Miss Delvigne looked at him surprised.

"Perhaps you are like myself, without relatives or friends, and in a strange land? but no, you are thoroughly English."

"I am English: nevertheless I am somewhat alone, though I never think of it much."

"Ah! you must have many friends, Sir Frederic!"

"You mistake me," said Neville, amused. "My friend Compton is whirling away with your fair friend."

"Oh—then you are Captain Neville! How strange!"

"Why strange?" he asked, looking into her eyes.

"I can hardly tell, only I thought you must be Sir Frederic Compton, because—because you looked the oldest. How bright and pleasant he seems to be."

"You admire him," said Neville, with some pique.

"I do," she returned, candidly; "he is not like what I expected."

"Then you had formed some expectations," resumed Neville, smiling though still piqued. "And you expected to find him a morose old fellow like myself?"

"You," said Miss Delvigne, looking up into his face and speaking slowly and thoughtfully—"you are *quite* different."

This did not sound very complimentary,—yet Neville never felt so complimented by any speech before. It implied so wide a gulf between himself and his friend, that for a moment he felt a superior being, and then Miss Delvigne asked—

"But is he a great friend of yours? Is he nice and good and true?"

"What the deuce does she want to know so much about him for?" thought Neville. "How bold all this would sound from an English girl:

yet it seems right and natural from her. She evidently knows old Foster's schemes, and is not indisposed towards them. Oh, yes," he said aloud, "Compton is a capital fellow, and true as steel; at least, to men."

"To men?" she said, musingly, and interrogatively.

"And to women too, probably," added Neville, "only I have had no opportunities of judging."

"Have you then no lady friends?" asked Miss Delvigne.

"Not many," he returned, smiling; "you know I told you I have been but little in England of late years."

"Tell me about India," said she, with a pretty air of command.

Neville found it a little difficult to begin, but once launched found it easy to continue, the sweet attentive eyes, so frankly raised to his, inspiring a degree of eloquence that surprised himself.

"And you have been in real battles—and seen men killed or, worse, lying helpless and suffering? I never talked to a soldier before. How horrible war must be!"

"Most horrible and brutal," replied Neville. "When the battle is over, one feels half ashamed of the fierce excitement it rouses."

"Ah! I could listen long to your stories, but

I have stayed too long; let us go back to the dancers."

"So soon?" cried Neville, "you cannot be missed just yet?"

She shook her head.

"Well, then, give me a flower, or even a leaf," he continued imploringly, for she had taken her bouquet from its resting-place, and was thoughtfully playing with it.

"Do you want one very, very much?" she asked, playfully, and with such a winning smile that Neville, surprised at his own feelings, and fearful of saying too much, contented himself with a glance, but one so expressive of admiration, that a sudden revelation flashed across his fair companion, who, with a dim, uneasy, yet delicious sense of danger, said, less frankly than before, "Let us return; perhaps Miss Weston will be looking for me."

Neville silently presented his arm, but checked his companion on the threshold of their leafy retreat.

"And my flower?" he said "do not cheat me."

Miss Delvigne hesitated, blushed, and shyly took a spray of heliotrope from her bosom, which Neville eagerly appropriated, and led her in silence back to the place from whence they came.

Here they found the pale, quiet girl, whom Neville's partner addressed affectionately.

"Have you been dancing, dearest?"

"No," said the pale girl, smiling with a pleasant arch expression; "but I have been much amused."

"That is well," said Miss Delvigne, and bowing to Neville, sat down.

He lingered a moment, loath to leave her, yet feeling himself dismissed. Presently Mrs. Coleman touched his arm,—

"Come, Captain Neville," she said, "let me get you a partner. I must take better care of my friends. I see Sir Frederic Compton, by some stupid mistake, is dancing with Miss Weston instead of Miss Delvigne."

"Pray do not inflict me on any more young ladies," said Neville, "I have disgusted Miss Delvigne."

"Miss Delvigne! Then *you* have been dancing with her?" cried Mrs. Coleman, in dissatisfied accents. "Ah! you must not be lazy, Captain Neville. I want recruits for the Lancers."

"That is quite beyond me," said Neville, bowing; and a waiter addressing some communication at that moment to the lady of the house, he escaped into a corner. From thence he had the satisfaction of watching the beautiful heiress go through the intricate figures with Sir Frederic, who seemed to make himself uncommonly agreeable, and to be on the happiest terms with his partner. Not even his memory

of the tone in which she had said, "You are quite different," could silence the whispers of the green-eyed monster. Gradually old thoughts crept back to Neville; the gnawing sense of debt and difficulty—the contention between his sudden passion for the fair American and his shame at reckoning on a wife's fortune to pay his debts. Yet it was not fair of Compton to suggest such a pleasant mode of liquidation, and then make love to the lady himself. It was not fair, by Jove! He (Neville) would make her a far better, steadier husband than a boy like Compton.

And so dance succeeded dance, and he saw the indefatigable Sir Frederic whirling round in a rapid waltz with the pale, quiet friend of the heiress, who looked just as unexcited as when she had been sitting alone.

"Now is my turn," thought Neville, and proceeded to search for the admired figure, which he soon descried, but, alas! leaning on the arm of a smooth-faced, accurately got-up, white-chokered young exquisite, of the composite order—a mingling of Belgravia with Marshall and Snelgrove's. But, oh! triumph! his eye caught hers, and she smiled a smile of such undoubted, pleased recognition, that Neville was himself again. So he waited with renewed patience until the scramble called by courtesy a quadrille was over, when, advanc-

ing with an air of old acquaintanceship, said, coolly—

“I am to take you in to supper;”—a command she did not dispute; for, courtesying to her partner, she took Neville’s offered arm, asking, with a bright smile—

“Who says so?”

“I do; forgive my audacity, but I feared to lose you.”

Miss Delvigne’s soft cheeks glowed, and her eyes suddenly sought Neville’s, with an earnest, questioning look.

“I am a careless, rough fellow,” he said gravely, replying unconsciously to the questioning glance; “but you asked me just now if my friend Compton was true. I think I can answer for myself that I am *true*, at least.”

“I did not doubt you,” she said, trying to re-assume the light tone of their first conversation; for there was a tenderness in Neville’s accents that half-frightened her. And then they reached the supper-room, where, over the usual indigestible mixture of chicken, tongue, lobster-salad, ice, jelly, and trashy champagne, they got more and more familiar—talking of feelings, and sentiments, and sympathy, and a dozen topics of which Neville never thought before. And, as he marked the unmistakable sincerity, the earnest simplicity that marked his companion’s tone, he felt more and more fascinated by

this truest type of womanhood he had ever met. She was so cultivated and refined, too, yet so natural, that his own difficulties and *mauvaise honte* seemed to melt away under the genial influence of her frank manner and easy tact.

Again the music summoned the loiterers.

"Let us rest once more in this quiet nook," said Neville, pausing at the conservatory, and drawing his companion into its leafy shade.

"Are you shut up all day at that school?" he continued. "Do you never walk or ride, or go anywhere a fellow might see you?"

Miss Delvigne shook her head—the smile faded away from lip and eyes.

"Pray give me some clue to your movements. I *must* see you again."

"Ah! Captain Neville, do not talk in that way. We have had a pleasant evening together, and now, I suppose, our roads in life will scarce cross again."

"They must! they shall!" cried Neville impetuously. "But I dare not go to see you."

"Come and see me!" said his companion, shrinking from the bare idea, yet laughing at the picture it conjured up. "Miss Redoubt would faint at the sight of you!"

"Well, then, do you never go out alone?"

"Never, except—" she paused, casting her large dark eyes down, while a half-mischievous smile played round her lips.

"Except! Except when? I implore you, do tell me—"

"I ought not—you know I ought not," returned Miss Delvigne, embarrassed, but yielding; then, brightening up a little—"I am a goose—you will forget all about it. I need not trouble myself—"

"Very well; having made up your mind on that point, you may as well tell me; do, Miss Delvigne, if it were only to try my memory."

She looked up with a bright smile; then, meeting Neville's eager, pleading eyes, turned away with some coquetry, and pulling the blossoms from her bouquet, said, in a low tone, and speaking quickly—

"On Thursdays and Saturdays I take a singing lesson at Signor Carrara's own house."

"And where may that be?" asked Neville, as she paused.

"Oh, in Albany Street."

"And you live somewhere in St. John's Wood? Your way lies across the Regent's Park; and at what hour?"

"Nay—that is enough."

"It is," said Neville, gazing into the speaking face before him.

"But this is foolish," said Miss Delvigne, rising.

As she spoke, her bracelet—one of dark hair and gold—fell from her arm, and Neville lifting

it proceeded to clasp it on again. Unaccustomed to such offices, he contrived to catch the skin in closing the snap, inflicting sufficient pain to make her start and shrink.

"I have hurt you—I have hurt you?" he exclaimed, in despair; and, following an irresistible impulse, pressed his lips passionately to the fair, round arm.

"Captain Neville!" cried the startled, confused girl, shrinking back, half frightened, with glowing cheeks.

"Forgive me!" Neville was beginning, when he heard Sir Frederic Compton call, at a distance—

"Neville, Miss Weston and Miss Delvigne are inexorably summoned home. Permit me—"

And then approaching the heiress, he offered her his arm with a deprecating glance at his comrade. Miss Delvigne accepted it, murmured a soft "Good-night!" and passing from Neville's confused vision, left him suddenly—deeply, passionately in love.

CHAPTER III.

AS soon as Neville and his friend could manage it they escaped from the festivities of Saratoga Lodge.

It was a lovely night. "The young May moon" was beaming as though especially bespoken for the occasion, and the gentlemen, lighting their cigars, strolled along between the fragrant gardens which adorn "the shady groves of the Evangelist," in the direction of town.

Sir Frederic was the first to speak—

"What do you think of the venture *now*, Neville?"

"Do you think I have any chance?" was the counter-questión.

"You'll go in and win, I suppose. 'Gad! you are in great luck! I say, old fellow, I am more than half sorry I agreed to bestow the heiress on you; she is a delightful creature, one's *beau idéal* of a girl, so frank and unconventional."

"Compton, if you regret your proposition for a moment, I will give up the scheme."

"Nonsense! I was in jest. If Miss Delvigne was twice as charming, I look upon her as so

completely your property, that I do not give her a thought for myself. But there is something peculiar about that little quiet girl I was dancing with, and, by Jove! her name is Delvigne too, for somebody spoke to her and your beauty answered, and then Mrs. Coleman—yes, it was Mrs. Coleman—said, rather stiffly, pointing to my little partner, ‘I mean *this* Miss Delvigne.’”

“It is curious! Devilish queer!” repeated Neville, thoughtfully. “By Jove! I shall be ready to cut my throat if my belle does not prove the right party. But there is a hansom—let us hail it.”

Arrived at Morley’s, Sir Frederic’s first inquiry was for his valet, and Simmons soon made his appearance, but with a crestfallen air.

“Did you see Mr. Foster when he called here to-day?” asked his master.

“Yes, Sir Frederic.”

“What did he want with me so particularly?”

“Can’t say, sir, but—I beg pardon, Sir Frederic, it’s very seldom as I forget, and I hope you’ll look over it this time, sir, but in my hurry going out I quite forgot to leave this note for you. Mr. Foster gave it to me the last time he came, sir, and I just put it into my pocket to make sure of it, and it quite escaped—”

“D—d careless of you,” interrupted his master, angrily. “It might have been of the last

importance; there, say no more about it; leave the room."

Neville had sat down dreamily in an easy-chair during this short colloquy, and looked on with a sort of lazy curiosity while Compton perused his grandfather's epistle; it was of some length, for a minute or two elapsed, and then Sir Frederic merrily laughed. Throwing himself on the sofa, he held out the note to his friend, "Here's a romantic dodge, Neville," he said, "read that."

"Read yourself," said Neville, drowsily.

"My dear boy," began the Baronet obediently, "'I am a good deal annoyed at not finding you, as I am obliged most unexpectedly to leave for Paris this evening; you must therefore present yourself at Mrs. Coleman's alone. I have, however, a hint to give you. My romantic ward, Miss Delvigne, has a favorite companion, the French teacher at Miss Redoubt's school, of the same name as her own, and she intends, in order to test you, to pass her off as the heiress and pretend herself to be the French girl. I overheard the proposition myself, as I entered their sitting-room this morning. This is an excellent opportunity for you, and I lost no time in endeavoring to give you warning, but fear I shall not be able to see you before I start. You can hardly make any mistake, however, as my ward is much more distinguished

and refined than the girl she has selected to fill her place. I hope to be back in a few days, when I shall, no doubt, find all progressing as I could wish.

“ ‘Very sincerely yours,

“ ‘JOHN FOSTER.”

“By Jove!” was all the thoroughly roused Neville could utter. “Then which was which?” he went on, as Compton continued to laugh, and re-read the letter. “Did your Miss Delvigne give you any clue?”

“No; she was rather silent, particularly after she found I was not Captain Neville. I suppose she did not think it was necessary to do much in the talking-line. Oh! yes—the little, quiet, pale thing must be the French teacher—she is a sweet girl, though, Neville! I took a fancy to her rather, and would like to meet her again.”

“Pshaw!—stuff!—you could not *marry* a French teacher!” said his more worldly friend.

“Why not?” returned the young Baronet. “But I do not want to marry any one at present.”

“There is no doubt the two girls were playing into each other’s hands,” resumed Neville, returning to the more interesting question; “for my partner thought I was Sir Frederic Compton, and then, when she found her mistake, cross-examined me pretty closely as to your disposition, Fred, your temper, etc. Oh, yes!

it is clear enough ; and I am confoundedly glad your old governor has given us a hint, for it would never do to get into the heiress's black books ; and I would not like to marry a foreign nobody. I do not care for money, but I like race, though if I ever met a girl that could turn a man's head, and make him forego his resolution, that girl is Miss Delvigne."

" Well, every man to his taste ! And, after all, your ' New Orlines ' gal ' may have had a half-caste for a grandmother ! Don't look glum, old fellow. But what do you intend to do next ? "

" Oh ! see her as soon and as often as I can. She goes to Albany Street every Thursday and Saturday for a music-lesson, and the day after to-morrow I'll waylay her in the Park. If she has any old screw to accompany her, I will merely bow. If not—and probably this friend of hers will be with her—I will feel my way. She is a charming creature. Heiress or no heiress, I should feel very much inclined to run away with her. By the way, is she a ward of Chancery ? That would complicate matters. "

" No ; my grandfather is her only guardian, and I trust when the old boy returns he will find all things progressing to *our* satisfaction. "

" How soon after a first meeting ought a fellow to propose ? " asked Neville thoughtfully.

"Can't tell! Suppose it depends. Never proposed to any one, Neville?"

"No, not marriage," said that gentleman gravely. "I feel as if I could ask Mary (her name is Mary, she pronounces it Marie) to-morrow! You see if I was rich, and she had not a penny, I would marry her. I would, by Jove!"

"If she was really the French governess?" put in Sir Frederic, slily.

"That is a different matter, and would not suit. But it is absurd to talk in that way. Look at the difference of the two girls—one had dependence stamped on her whole bearing."

"Yes, poor little soul," said Compton kindly. "I suppose she hasn't an easy life of it. 'Gad, I'd like to take care of her."

"Fate forbids such things to be," returned his mentor. "But let us to bed; this is a capital hint of your grandfather's. I'll not fail to profit by it."

CHAPTER IV.

THE anticipated Saturday rose clear and fair. It was an exquisite morning, worthy of the month of May, with life and fragrance, and verdure, and all fresh loveliness lending beauty even to what had none in itself.

Neville, after looking in all directions in vain, took refuge in a cigar, and placed himself under one of those islands of stripling trees which dot the Regent's Park, near the broad walk. It was now close on two o'clock—what if she would not come! or came escorted by some duenna-like governess! perhaps the awful Redoubt herself! As these uneasy thoughts perplexed him, a light, active step approached; he turned sharply round, and she was before him—herself—fresh and bright as ever. Her cool-looking muslin dress and scarf, so exquisitely becoming and appropriate—the quiet bonnet with its delicate white ribbon, bouquets of wild roses and artistic mingling of black lace was enchantingly becoming and “*coquet*,” and from the neat parasol to the dainty boot she was every inch a woman to be loved—a lady to be respected.

And Marie Delvigne was marvellously moved.

She would have been scarce mortal, and certainly not an interesting mortal, had so brilliant a hero as ours made no impression on her mind. To tell the truth, this specimen of mankind, so different from all she had hitherto known, had scarce left her dazzled eyes since they first met. He was the "ocean to the river of her thoughts," and studies and exercises had alike been obscured by constantly pondering the question—"If, after all, I *were* to meet him in the Park?"

The encounter was such an unexpected fulfilment of her resisted hopes and imaginings, that for a moment her heart was still, and her cheek paled—then the color flushed quick over cheek and brow, and her heart beat vehemently.

The sight of so much irrepressible emotion gave Neville a sudden sense of his own importance and superiority, like a true man as he was, because the fibre of brain and nerve in him, of stronger and coarser texture, vibrated with less delicate accuracy to the promptings of the spirit, than in woman's finer organization. It was therefore with tolerable self-possession he raised his hat, and throwing away his cigar, smilingly addressed her—

"You have chosen the hottest part of the day, Miss Delvigne. It was much cooler an hour ago!"

"Ah, Captain Neville! I am surprised! but it

is a pleasant place to lounge in with a cigar on so lovely a morning."

"Is it? Well, I never found it out before. Let me carry this for you—music, I suppose. What a thick roll—you don't intend to sing it all to-day? You'll be frightfully done up."

"Oh, no! I could sing more than is there without much fatigue. You see, a good deal of it is the accompaniment."

"Is it really?" as if she had announced a wonderful fact. "And when must you be with this singing fellow?"

"At half-past two."

"Well, it is now only two—so you need not quicken your pace—you are not afraid of a rowing, are you?"

"A rowing!" repeated Mary, puzzled.

"A blowing up!" explained Neville. "He would be a flinty sort of a fellow that could be down on your misdeeds!" And he glanced tenderly into his companion's eyes.

"Ah! you mean that Signor Carrara would scold me. Yes, indeed he would; his minutes are very precious; but, on the whole, I am a favorite with him—he is very good to me."

"I should think so," said Neville quietly, with another expressive look from his grave, gray eyes, which sunk into his hearer's heart, and called the color to her cheeks.

It was wonderful how much their relative

positions had changed since the previous Thursday evening. Then, he was the humble, confused suitor, almost tremblingly watchful for every crumb of favor; now, informed by the treachery of a speaking face what was the real condition of the besieged, he was more in love than ever, it is true, yet conscious of a lordly certainty, a mastership of the position that lent a sort of assured tenderness to his manner, which nevertheless was profoundly respectful.

So it is ever!—in the struggle between man and woman there is a perpetual ebb and flow—a constant balance—one cannot descend without elevating the other. Marie felt this, though she could not explain it; and, woman-like, was all the more fascinated, because Neville involuntarily exercised a sort of power by his very composure. She fought bravely for self-control, and with feminine instinct changed the conversation.

“What a dreadful-looking man!” she exclaimed, as one of those ragged, dirty, sullen types of humanity, which too often come “between the wind and our nobility” in this luxurious city, passed them after they had walked some way.

“Yes,” said Neville; “an ugly customer for you to meet alone; by the way—though I am deucedly glad of it—why do they let you walk all this way by yourself?”

"Ah!" said Marie, her heart sinking so low that she thought she felt it beating in the soles of her feet—"You think I am somebody! You mistake me for my friend! I am but the French teacher—nobody at all, except to myself!" and she trembled.

"Oh! you are the French teacher, are you?" said Neville, quite unmoved—with a kindly sort of smile in his eyes—you could not see much of it on his lips, for, like Esau, he was a "hairy man"—"but that is no reason why you are not to be taken care of."

"Perhaps," said Marie, laughing, while her heart sprang back with a flash of electric joy—then he did not care—it was all the same to him—"but you know it is nobody's business," she continued aloud.

"Will you let it be mine?" asked Neville, half in jest, astonished at his own fluency; but this was going too fast, and Marie began to wish him away—to have time to recover herself, and think.

"You have plenty to do, I suppose; you cannot smoke cigars here every day," she said.

"I can always manage one in this locality on Thursdays and Saturdays," returned Neville.

"No, no; you must not!" she exclaimed hastily, "it would not do! it would not be right!" and she stopped suddenly, her cheek flushing, and feeling really anxious to get rid of him—for they were now almost at the entrance

to Albany Street, and Marie felt she could not be seen at Signor Carrara's door with so distinguished an escort.

"Good-by, Captain Neville," she said with sudden decision, and pausing abruptly.

"Must it be good-by so soon?" he replied.

"Yes."

"But why?" he was beginning, when, with uncommon astuteness for a John Bull, he reflected that it might pain her to say she must not be seen with him, and he was silent.

She held out her hand—a little, daintily-gloved hand—and he took it in his, where it lay, lost to sight, but certainly "to memory dear," when, a moment after, Neville stood alone, the last wave of her dress floated round the turn into Albany Street, out of sight. He stood alone, and furious with himself for losing her so soon, without some arrangement for a future meeting, without some link being fastened in the chain which was to bind them together. What a sweet, frank creature! What a graceful lithe figure! Surely she was not indifferent to him! and thus added the merit of discrimination to her other charms.

A second interview in the same locality on the following Thursday was secured by Neville's watchfulness; it however furthered his projects but little, for Miss Delvigne was less at her ease, more timid, and apparently anxious to get rid of

her admirer, even while she betrayed her growing interest in him. Neville, fearful of startling her by too sudden an advance, was left in a painful state of perplexity as to his next step. Time was pressing, too, and to stave off present necessities he was obliged to let his friend lend him five hundred pounds. How he chafed under this complication of worry may be imagined, with his strong, impatient temper, and proud, unyielding nature; for Neville, though popular among his comrades as a fine fellow, was not an amiable man.

He followed up the game, however, with so much skill and perseverance that Marie Delvigne seldom left the house without encountering him. Were she accompanied by any of the governesses or young ladies he merely lifted his hat with grave courtesy; were she alone, he managed to join her, his quiet, respectful manner putting her at her ease for the moment, yet not blinding her to the indiscretion of which she was guilty, in listening to him, and allowing herself to contract a certain degree of familiarity with a man of whose antecedents she was so ignorant. She knew she ought not to let him assume a sort of right to meet her, and yet it soon came to be a sacrifice too great for her strength to bid him farewell.

Yet if their conversations had been reported, very little that could be defined as love-making

would have been found therein. Nevertheless, day after day Neville parted from her with more and more of reluctance, and a constantly increasing conviction that he was gaining ground, though Marie was very shy, and liable to panics, and fits of coldness that, so far from allaying her lover's feverish impatience, added fuel to the fire. Sometimes, too, she had pensive, almost melancholy moods, that nearly set him wild with an overpowering desire to clasp her to his heart, and implore her to trust herself and her future to his guidance.

To Marie it was a most trying time ; she never bid Neville good-by without telling herself it was most probably forever, as the whim which made him seek her might at any moment either fade away or be replaced by a fresh fancy. It was this ever-recurring doubt which gave an uncertainty to her manner, her *maintien*, that Neville did not understand, and by which he was at times chilled and repulsed; still she grew every day more dear, more necessary, and in moments of excitement he could scarce keep back the declaration he feared to make prematurely.

"Miss Delvigne has already saved me some hundreds, I fancy," said he to his friend, as they sat at dinner a few weeks after Mrs. Coleman's party ; "for since I have entered into this scheme, it seems to have left me no room or time to care

for anything else; and as I really do love the girl, I am fighting a perpetual mental battle.* I want her—I am determined to have her; but then my very first move must be to get hold of her money when she is my wife, and if she knows my necessities, she will distrust my motives. Poor little soul! She played the governess trick very transparently—was all in a tremble, and evidently expected I would politely say good-morning, and leave her. Ah! Compton, what a light came into her eyes when she saw I was undisturbed by her announcement. By Jove, I feel like a regular swindler. But if she will have me, she shall never repent it.”

“No, of course not; and you must never let her find out that you knew she was the heiress till you have been married a good long while, and then get over it the best way you can. I really see no other line open for you—I mean as regards her. After all, your debts are a mere trifle compared to her fortune. However, don’t grow sentimental. What shall we do next? I think you had better, at the present stage, shell the fortress with a few rounds of fiery love-letters.”

“I do not fancy I should do that sort of thing well, Compton. I do not mind writing straightforward, asking her to be my wife, and telling her I am a poor devil in debt and difficulty—suggesting that we should fight the battle of life

side by side—that's a good idea; but then we must reconnoitre the premises, and see how we could get a letter conveyed. We must be careful. If Saturday is tolerably fine, I shall endeavor to see her once more before I open the battery."

"Perhaps it would be as well," returned the staunch counsellor; "but I should like to have the matter finished, and you away on your wedding expedition, before my grandfather returns. It will be a treat to see the old gentleman open his eyes when he hears the news."

How to open communications with some of the functionaries of Miss Redoubt's establishment was now the difficulty; and even if this could be done there was a great reluctance to compromise Miss Delvigne in the eyes of any servant.

"If I could induce her to give me any clue to guide us," said Neville, in one of their numerous consultations, "but I fear she will not. To say truth, I am afraid to ask her."

"Afraid! Pshaw! Let me send Simmons to reconnoitre."

"I would rather go myself," returned Neville.

"You will look so confoundedly suspicious."

"I will have a try though," said our hero.

Accordingly about midday, when all St. John's Wood was at luncheon, a tall, mustached man might have been seen sauntering, in a purpose-

less way, up and down the devious turnings of that refined locality, and ultimately pausing at the junction of Warrington Terrace and Carlingford Villas. He looked round, and stood as if lost in thought, till the sound of a wheezy, aggravating cough caught his attention. He turned and saw, niched into a convenient corner, a grayish-brownish bundle of tolerable dimensions, surmounted by a crunched bonnet, under which further inspection elucidated a withered, russet face, with twinkling watery eyes, and a big, helpless-looking mouth. The feet of the figure were propped up on a wooden footstool, and beside her, on a small, low table, was a basket of oranges and some stout bunches of wallflowers.

"Ugh, ugh!" gasped the old woman. "Buy a purty posy from a poor widdy, whose heart is bruck with the cough, and the Lord will reward you. I haven't sold a ha'porth this blessed day."

"Why do you stick to so unfavorable a situation?" said Neville, idly entering into talk with her.

"Oh! sure more times I've better luck. The young ladies, God bless them! do be tinder-hearted to the poor widdy, God bless them! but none of them give me a penny to-day."

At the mention of young ladies, Neville pricked up his ears.

"What young ladies?" he asked, in a careless tone.

"Sure, the young ladies out of the Simmi-naries; they do be marching down like regiments of soldiers in a morning, and they give a poor soul a copper now and again. But there's one ov 'em—the Lord in Heaven look down upon her! She buys mee flowers, and spakes like an angel. Ah! if the rich always knew the valley of a kind word—ugh, ugh!—Oh, Lord!"

"And who is this angel of a young lady?" said Neville, dimly expecting to hear the beloved name.

"Faith! I dunno her name; but every Thursday and Saturday, as reg'lar as the day comes, she passes mee place, and has a kind word and a trifle of talk."

"Ha! And does she live near?"

"At number twenty-two—no less—a big house, there, to the right, forenent you. Faith, she's a grand lady, and as purty a cratur' as yer eyes 'ud rest upon."

Number twenty-two was Miss Redoubt's famous establishment—it must be Marie Delvigne!

"I think I know the young lady you mean," said Neville, with diplomatic skill, "a short, fair girl!"

"No—faith," said the old woman. "Her eyes is like two sloes, and her hair's as black as your hat, an' she has a color like a rose. The blessin'

of Heaven be with her. Hasn't she a lucky mark—a brown mole on her left cheek—and may luck attend her! Won't your honor buy a posy from a poor widdy?"

"None to-day; but there's a shilling for you. Good-morning."

"The Heavens be your bed!" exclaimed the astonished widdy; "and—ugh! ugh!—"

An opportune fit of coughing cut short her eloquence, as Neville turned hastily away, for signs of life were beginning to show themselves.

CHAPTER V.

COMPTON and his friend had various and different engagements during the rest of the next day ; and it was not till Sunday morning that they met again, when Sir Frederic at a glance saw that Neville looked "all astray."

"I've been looking everywhere for you, Compton," he said. "Here's a sell ! didn't see her—didn't meet her ! Wandered about that confounded Park till the police looked at me suspiciously ; could get no trace of her ! What's to be done ?"

"Done ?" repeated Compton. "Now is your time for a letter ; write, and have it ready for any chance ; we will manage the conveyance afterwards. She may have changed the days for her lessons. A thousand things may have happened."

"I'll tell you what I did on Friday," said Neville, and proceeded to describe his interview with the orange woman.

"Capital !" said Sir Frederic, as he concluded. "'The widdy' shall be Cupid's messenger."

"No ; that would never do. I shall manage better in some way."

The composition of this epistle taxed Neville's powers rather severely; and after in vain endeavoring to render it an elegant production, he threw all his scribblings into the fire, and dashed off an earnest, simple, straightforward letter, in which he told the heiress of his sudden and deep passion—of the difficulties which surrounded him—of the opposition which their proposed marriage would call forth, and the complication its publicity would add to the troubles in which he was already plunged, but from which he hoped ere long to extricate himself.

"Once you are my own," it proceeded, "everything seems possible. With you by my side, life has no task I do not feel capable of accomplishing. Trust to me, and your future shall be my tenderest care," etc., etc.

In short, Neville, thoroughly in earnest, produced a very readable letter, and one well calculated to make a heart, already full of him, all his own. He concluded by an impassioned entreaty that she would give him some opportunity of speaking to her—of pleading his cause personally, when he could better explain his hopes and fears.

"She will not hesitate long," he said to Sir Frederic. "She will put me out of pain one way or the other; for if ever woman was true and upright she is, though there is just the least

dash of coquetry about her—just enough to set one burning steadily, like a slow match! It is a wonderful position, Compton, to be head and ears in love with the right person!"

"By Jove! you may say so."

"Now," continued Neville, "I'll be off to my new acquaintance, the old apple-woman, and try to manage some means of conveying this"—tapping the letter. "I suppose the old lady does not attend divine service?" (It was Sunday.)

"I dare say by the time you reach Carlingford Terrace she will be at her post. The people will be feeding from one to two, so you'll have the field for yourself. Shall I come with you?"

"No. She might take fright at two inquirers. Do you want to come?"

"Well, I'd like to see that little pale girl again."

Neville frowned; he did not like the idea of Compton seeking a friend of his future wife's. He did not think such seeking could end well.

In spite of his attempts to delay, Neville was rather too soon at the apple-woman's corner, and encountered the whole tide of schools returning from church.

"By Jove!" he often exclaimed, in after years, describing it. "It was like shoals of mackerel or herrings sweeping over space, and overwhelming you like an avalanche. Regiments of

them, so demure and steady that I felt utterly abashed and out of countenance before them."

Third or fourth of these detachments came Miss Redoubt's troop, among the most distinguished and highly disciplined. The ranks were closed by two young ladies, more mature in age than the others, in whom Neville quickly recognized the friends and namesakes. The beautiful heiress flushed all over with electric rapidity, and then turned pale, as he gravely and silently bowed to them. The little pale French governess took scarce any notice of him. Another moment, and they were hidden from his sight by the gates of No. 22.

Neville's heart beat high. She could not be indifferent to him when her color changed so marvellously. How little she dreamed he had such an important communication for her in his pocket! A few minutes more, and almost all stragglers had disappeared. Neville approached the old woman.

"You do not take a holiday, then?" he said good-naturedly.

"Faith! I do not," she returned. "Shure Sunday's mee best day. The bits of boys and girls, the cratures do be going up to Hampstead, and stop to buy oranges of a poor widdy. P'raps yer honor wants a posy to-day?"

"No, thank you! And your young lady friends, have they been good to you lately?"

"Ah! shure, mee dark-eyed darlint has just gone by with the dawshy little white cratur' that's always along wid her; but she never stops when they are all together. She'll be back by and by, maybe, by herself, and then she'll have a kind word for the poor widdy."

Neville paused; he could not surmount an invincible repugnance to put Marie Delvigne in the power of so low and ignorant a creature as he now addressed.

"And where does this angel of yours go to church?" he asked, carelessly.

"Oh! down below there. You'll a'most see the spire beyant the big house at the corner."

"How do you know she goes there?"

"Shure, all the ladies do be going there. Isn't the clargy a great pracher entirely, and curses an' damns us poor papists up and down? Faith! he'll know the differ one day. And sorra a word the Blessed Mary will say for him!"

"I might make some opportunity to give her the letter in church," mused Neville. "I'll try."

He strolled on to the church, and met the clerk coming out.

"When does the afternoon service begin?"

"At half-past three, sir," returned that functionary, somewhat surprised.

"Who preaches?" continued Neville.

"The Reverend Mr. Jones, sir."

"Oh! thank you."

In a couple of hours he returned and presented himself.

"Could you place me next Miss Redoubt's seat?" he whispered, pressing half a crown into the pew-opener's hand.

"I think I can, sir."

And accordingly, Neville had the felicity of contemplating the back of the adored one's bonnet, through a service that seemed interminable. At last it was over, and Neville managed adroitly to pass with Miss Delvigne, side by side, down the aisle; and, during the transit, slid his letter into the folds of her parasol.

It was neatly done; but as he saw her shrink and change color he whispered in eager accents.

"For God's sake, read it!"

It was but a moment's work, and no eye or ear save their own detected what was passing. But Marie's cheek glowed and paled; her brain grew dizzy; she felt how momentous for her was this morning's work. But—she took the letter. What else could she do, without risking a slander? What else could she do, when her heart was yearning for the love of the grave, chivalrous-looking stranger, who had sought her so pertinaciously, and whose earnest eyes expressed so much tenderness and admiration?

It was safely in her possession, without betrayal; and now two weary days had to come

and go before Neville could judge what progress he had made. Nevertheless, it was with an unwonted sense of exultation that he met Sir Fred-eric at dinner.

"Now," said he, "grant I am not quite so clumsy a fellow as you took me for."

"No, by Cupid and Venus! You are within a few lengths of the winning-post. She will meet you. You must hurry matters on; do not give her time to think; be married next week; get a license, and all that sort of thing, and be ready for a start."

But Marie Delvigne not only read Neville's letter, she answered it. Two days after his successful stratagem he received a little note—a little, tremulously-written note, that made him almost fancy he heard the writer's heart beat.

"I may be doing very wrong, yet I *will* see and hear you; I can only do so by missing my lesson on Thursday, and there is always the chance of some one being sent with me. Yet it is the only opportunity I can make. Are you not very unwise to seek me, if it will vex every one? Ah! think well. But I can write no more. May God guide us both!—M. D."

Not even to his confidant Compton would Neville mention this little billet; short and simple as it was, it expressed vividly the mingled trust and fear, the delicacy, the tenderness of the writer.

"Thursday is a deuced long way off," thought Neville as he read Marie's note over and over again. "I wish I was not weighted with the sense of being a humbug! Will Marie distrust me by and by, when she knows I had the word of her little enigma? Well, at all events, she cannot fail to feel that I love her as ardently as ever woman was loved; and that ought to cover a multitude of sins. Poor darling! what a horrid fright she was in when she wrote this! and there are more than forty-eight hours to drag through before I can comfort her."

Neville was greatly moved by the agitation which Marie could not control on meeting him; though her color came often and quickly, it always left her deadly pale, and her eyes looked larger and more wistful than ever.

All the chivalry and tenderness of his nature were drawn forth by the unmistakable signs of her emotion, and he pleaded his cause with earnest truthfulness, that could not fail to ensure success. "After all, it can't be such a tremendous undertaking to marry a fellow that is so awfully fond of you as I am!" he concluded, after a long talk and arrangement of plans; "and if you are not frightened by the catalogue I have given you of my difficulties, why, I see nothing to prevent our being as happy as the day is long! I suppose you have not confided in any one at the school?"

"Only to my kind little friend and namesake, and she is quite safe."

"What, your friend the—the heiress?" asked Neville.

"Yes; she is very friendless too. Perhaps I—you—we may befriend her hereafter!"

"Of course you shall," said Neville, smiling to himself; "and must I let you go now? It is deuced hard! You will write directly you can fix a day to visit these friends of yours—what do you call them?—at Bayswater?"

"Madame Lacordeille; they are Southern State people."

"Very well, give me three or four days' notice, and all shall be prepared. God bless you, my darling! I shall have you before my eyes day and night till we meet again! Do not torment yourself;—a month hence you will wonder why you ever hesitated to promise yourself to me!"

CHAPTER VI.

“WHAT is the matter with you, Mademoiselle Delvigne?” asked Miss Redoubt, with sudden, unusual curiosity, one afternoon about this time. “I do hope you are not sickening for anything! It would be most inconvenient just now. You are looking like a ghost, and I am told you burst out crying in the French class this morning!—a great sign of weakness. No girl will look up to a teacher who *cries*,” with contemptuous emphasis.

“I do not see why girls are to expect their governesses to be more than human,” said Miss Delvigne the heiress aggressively.

“You know nothing about it, my dear!” said the stern mistress of the establishment, “though it is very sweet of you to take Mademoiselle’s part. It is my aim ever to be just and considerate, and I feel I am both in insisting on Mademoiselle telling me the truth as to the state of her health. I have a solemn and a sacred charge entrusted to me—the spiritual and temporal and sanatory welfare of twelve young ladies of distinction; and I must act accordingly.”

This cross-examination took place in an apart-

ment on an upper story, known as the study, where the young ladies prepared their lessons, etc., now only tenanted by the two friends and namesakes.

"Mademoiselle," as she was generally called, certainly looked ill—pale, downcast, tremulous, and paused a moment before she replied :

"I do not feel quite myself, Madame; but there is nothing to alarm you; it is more nervousness than bodily indisposition which almost unfits me for my duties. I inherit an excitable nature."

"Inherit excitability! this is alarming!" cried Miss Redoubt.

"I think," resumed Marie, coloring, hesitating and showing signs of confusion, "if I had a holiday—a little rest—I might recover."

"Holiday—rest! in the very busiest part of the term! Impossible! If you want rest, you must be content to give up your appointment, Mademoiselle, and give me leave to fill your place."

"If you insist upon it I must," returned Marie, still in the same low, timid tone. "I thought next week, during the Easter holidays, I might have a few days' leave of absence. I might go to my friend, Madame Lacordeille, and recover my strength, or—"

"I can allow nothing of the kind," cried Miss Redoubt; "Miss Lewis and Miss Marsden will

be here and I have promised Miss Morris and Miss Green, the two English governesses, permission to go and see their friends; so if you insist on going too, Mademoiselle, you need not return."

There was a moment's silence; the New Orleans heiress opened her lips to speak, and closed them again resolutely, looking from one to the other with the deepest interest and kindling eyes. Mademoiselle had risen from her seat when Miss Redoubt first addressed her, and now remained standing with downcast eyes, and hands that clasped and unclasped each other nervously.

There was no indecision, however, in her voice, as she replied calmly and distinctly, "Very well, Madame; I accept your dismissal."

"And pray what do you intend to do, Mademoiselle? If I am reluctantly obliged to state that your health and strength are unequal to your work you will not find it so easy to procure another engagement."

"I must take my chance, Madame. If I am unsuccessful I must return to Paris to my people."

"I consider you exceedingly weak and foolish, but perhaps I may be the gainer in the end; moral weakness such as yours could never attain the standard I expect from my employés."

With a haughty aspect Miss Redoubt sailed

out of the room. Miss Delvigne started up and shook her small fist at the retreating figure. "Nasty, disagreeable old cat!" she exclaimed. "What is the meaning of it all? *Are* you ill? Are you really going away, or will you make it up?"

Mademoiselle Delvigne stood quite still and silent, gazing with an odd, fixed, strained look towards the window, evidently not seeing any of the objects which surrounded her.

"Marie, dearest, speak to me! something is the matter, more than I know. If you leave, how desolate I shall be! Do speak, Marie!" putting her arms round her. "You can trust me, and I am sure you are in awful trouble."

"No, not exactly trouble, but in terrible dread and agitation," she returned in a low, quick tone, glancing round nervously. "I think we are safe for a little while; there are some visitors coming up the garden, and the girls are all out. Oh, *ma mie!* I ought not to tell you, but I must, or I shall lose my head! Oh, dearest, be true to me!"

"I never was false in my life," said the New Orleans girl proudly. "Why, Marie, what is the matter?" for the young French governess clasped her tightly, and, laying her head on her shoulder, burst into a flood of tears, weeping quietly, intensely, and struggling to suppress her sobs.

"*Chère amie*," she whispered when she was a little calmer, "I want to leave this house; I want to go quite away, but I fear to tell you why—you may perhaps think me wrong, imprudent. I am afraid myself I am, yet I cannot draw back."

"What on earth are you going to do?" exclaimed her friend, opening her dark eyes in amazement. "You are surely not going to marry any one?"

"I am," whispered Mademoiselle Delvigne, pressing her brow upon the heiress's hands, which she held in hers. "I am going away with a man I have only known about two months, a comparative stranger, of whose nature and disposition and history I know nothing. Oh! I see how imprudent, how bold, how unwomanly it all is, as well as Miss Redoubt herself could; and yet when *he* is with me I forget all this, and only feel unbounded trust in him, and that it is impossible to refuse him, or let him go!"

"I suppose 'he' is that Captain Neville?"

"Yes; how do you know?"

"I have eyes in my head, and I have noticed *his* when we have met him, and the odd way he has been appearing every now and then in this neighborhood. I say, dear! it is an awfully wild thing to do!" Her clasp of her friend's hand tightened as she spoke.

"It is! If three months ago any one had told me that I could be tempted to such a step, I should have been infinitely offended, and denied the imputation; yet—"

She stopped, and bit her lip to keep back the sobs that would heave her bosom. "And yet you are going to do it," added Miss Delvigne.

"Ah! you despise me—you think me mad, infatuated! *You* would never do such a thing!"

"How do you know?" asked the other, smiling. "Nobody ever made love to *me*, and asked me to run away with him! At the same time, I wish you would not do it, Marie. Why doesn't this man come here and see you, and ask you to be his wife openly? I am sure he looks bold and resolute enough to do anything, and old enough to be his own master too."

"He does—he is," said Marie eagerly. "But there are reasons he has fully explained to me. He is in debt and difficulties, and he has some hopes of his brother or some relation assisting him; but if this relation knew that Guy was going to be married he would make objections, and be implacable, whereas if Guy is actually married he cannot help it, and will not be so hard."

"I don't see how Captain Neville makes that out," said the quick-witted American. "Anyhow, it is a bad look-out for you. Suppose

Captain Neville's relatives leaves him in the lurch? What is to become of you?"

"Oh! Guy says the sale of his commission will put him right, and we must just go away to New Zealand or Australia, and struggle on together."

"Does he?" cried the heiress, much struck by this proof of devotion and faithfulness. "Then he must be a real good fellow if he will give up everything for you, and you ought to follow him to the ends of the earth."

"I think," whispered Marie, resting her glowing cheek against her friend's shoulder, to avoid her eyes—"yes, I do think he loves me—and oh! dearest, how can I refuse him? Look what my life is! I am a mere drudge—ill paid, uncared for. If I look ill I am taken to task for possibly defrauding my employers by physical inability; all my life long I have known I was a burden to be got rid of as soon as possible! Except your dear self no one seems to consider me worth a second thought. If I dare for a moment to forget that I am a machine I am soon pushed back into my groove. *Here*, I am the French teacher, entitled to nothing but my pay and my food—a creature of no value beyond her teaching properties—you heard how that cold, hard woman spoke to me just now! And there, when I meet *him*, he sees if I am a shade paler or sadder than usual; he wants to know



every sorrow—every annoyance that has affected me; he understands every change in my voice—the very way he utters my name is a caress! I did not want to listen to him at first; I tried hard to avoid him, but I could not; his will was too strong for me, and I was bewildered, overwhelmed. No one ever cared for me before; and”—solemnly—“he *does* love me! it is something awful to be so much loved! What is there in my life to compensate for such a chance of happiness if I reject it? Cold, colorless desolation on one side, and love and joy and light on the other! No one else loves me—no one has any claim on my duty or obedience; and even if hereafter he changes, I will have had a little spell of brightness, and be able to say, ‘Come what may, I have been blessed.’ For I *do* love him, Marie. I could work for him—live for him.” She ended this rapid, passionate outbreak by a flood of tears.

“And if he ever changes to you, he will be a nasty, disagreeable, odious thing!” cried the heiress. “But I am sure he will not; he looks very nice. At any rate, there is no use in my making any more wise speeches; your fate is fixed. Now tell me all about it, and don’t cry and sob so dreadfully.”

Thus exhorted, Mademoiselle Delvigne tried hard to regain her composure, and ultimately succeeded. Then her friend, losing sight of her

original prudence and scruples in the supreme interest of so romantic and absorbing an affair, proceeded to cross-examine her.

"I suppose you wanted your holiday to get off?"

"Yes; but it suits me much better to be dismissed. I do not want to make any scandal here; I shall say I am going to France, which is, I believe, quite true; and I shall write to Madame Lacordeille to be so kind as to take care of my large box; so it will be some days before I am missed."

"Madame Lacordeille! that is your Illinois friend who lives at Bayswater?"

"Yes; she has been very kind to me, and—and—I feel rather ashamed of not telling her, but it would make too much fuss. Oh, it is all terrible! And, Marie, dear, I must write at once to Captain Neville, and tell him I am to leave next Wednesday; for he is to arrange everything, and will meet me, and we are to go straight to church. Oh, if you only could be with me! Is it not awful to think of having no woman friend near me—not a soul I ever saw before! Sometimes I seem quite brave, and only to think of Guy and of being happy, and then again I am crushed and overpowered with a sense of shame and terror!"

"As you are quite determined to go through with it, the less you torment yourself the better;

make haste, write your letter to your *fiancée*. I am going to dine at Mrs. Coleman's, and I will manage to post it for you."

"Oh! thanks—a thousand hearty thanks."

"By the way, how have you contrived to get his letters?"

"It was an awful risk at first, but the govern-ess's letters are never looked at, and latterly he made me give him envelopes directed by myself. Oh, I cannot tell you how ashamed I am of all this deception!"

"Yes; that is the worst part of it. Now run away and bathe your eyes—you look dreadful! When are you to leave?"

"Almost all the girls go away on Tuesday afternoon; I shall go away early on Wednesday."

"Oh, I wish I could go with you and stay with you!" cried Miss Delvigne. "I hate this place, and when you have gone it will be too miserable!"

"But soon, perhaps, you may come and see me," said Marie, brightening and smiling through her tears as the delightful idea presented itself. "I was talking of you to Guy—to Captain Neville—the last time I saw him, and he said I should look after you, or befriend the little heiress, or some such thing!"

"Did he? I am glad of that," returned Miss Delvigne, who had listened with grave attention.

An hour later Miss Delvigne was on her road to Mrs. Coleman's, accompanied by the second English governess, as she had requested leave to walk to Saratoga Lodge, the weather being very fine, and the dinner was strictly a family gathering.

About half way down Hamilton Terrace a gentleman passing in a hansom looked somewhat eagerly at the two ladies, who were walking leisurely along, and, after allowing the cab to go ahead some little way, made the driver pull up, alighted, dismissed him, and turned to meet the pedestrians. The gentleman was young, slight, *svelte*, most elegantly and carefully dressed, and had a touch of soldierly bearing in his gait and carriage. He made a halt when he met the two ladies. -

"Miss Delvigne, I think," he said, raising his hat with much deference. "May I venture to recall myself to your memory? I had the pleasure of dancing with you at Mrs. Coleman's party some time ago."

"I remember you quite well," said the little heiress, with her usual unhesitating straightforwardness; "your name is Compton?"

"Yes; I feel flattered by your remembering it."

"I have a good memory," said Miss Delvigne shortly; and Compton walked on a few paces in silence, utterly at a loss how to recommence the conversation, yet piqued and attracted by

the cool self-possession of the little French governess. "I suppose you don't get much in the way of parties and dancing up here?" he said at last.

"No, indeed! nothing but grind, grind, grind, from morning till night. I am sometimes inclined to jump out of the window."

"Pray let me know when you decide on such a step," said Sir Frederic, laughing, "and I will try to be under it at the right moment."

"Oh! if I made up my mind to jump I should want no help after. I have always been accustomed to take care of myself."

"No doubt, poor little soul!" thought Sir Frederic to himself; "uncommon hard lines it must be for a girl to push her way." "I suppose you are very plucky," he said aloud. "It is a grand thing for a girl to be plucky."

"I do not know that I am; indeed I scarcely understand your English words. I think plucky and pluck very stupid words. They convey no meaning to my ear."

"Do you dislike us English? I hope not. We are better than we seem."

"But not better than you think yourselves. You are awfully conceited."

"That is quite a mistake! Are we not renowned for our *mauvaise honte*?"

"Ah, yes; but there is generally conceit at the bottom of *mauvaise honte*."

"You are far too severe, Miss Delvigne. I shall change the subject. How is your friend and namesake whom I had the pleasure of meeting also at Mrs. Coleman's? Is she grinding at home this fine day?"

"Oh, yes; she grinds harder than any one else. But she is going away."

"Indeed!" ejaculated the governess, who had walked on in silence, watching an opportunity for joining in the conversation, and feeling a little uneasy at their being thus accompanied. "I had no idea she was going to leave."

"I did not say she was," returned Miss Delvigne, vexed with herself for having admitted so much. "She is going to her friends for the holidays at any rate."

"When?" asked Sir Frederic a little eagerly.

"On Wednesday," returned Miss Delvigne, looking at him very straight, and instantly divining that he was in the plot.

Their eyes met. Sir Frederic smiled; Miss Delvigne's color rose.

"Would you not like to accompany her?" he said.

"Yes, indeed, but I have not so much liberty. However, I have some hopes of travelling in Switzerland or the Tyrol in July and August,—that will be delightful."

"Charming," returned Sir Frederic absently; and there was another pause, during which Miss

Green, the English governess, who was on thorns during this intermittent conversation, screwed up her courage to observe—

“Perhaps, my dear, we ought not to detain the gentleman; we have a little farther to go, and—”

“Detain me?” cried Sir Frederic; “oh, dear, no! I have nothing particular to do. Later on I am going to dine with Neville. Do you remember Neville, Miss Delvigne, at the Coleman’s dance?”

“I do—readily; a tall, grave-looking man. He is a great friend of yours, is he not?”

“Yes, we are great chums. I shall miss him terribly when he leaves the regiment, as he talks of doing. He is a capital fellow.”

“What constitutes a capital fellow?” asked the little heiress.

“Oh—ah! A fellow whose word is as good as his oath—who will back you up if you are in a fix, and never shirks his fences.”

“And is Captain Neville all this? I thought he looked proud and cold.”

“Yes; humility is not one of his distinguishing virtues,” said Sir Frederic, laughing. “But you seem to take an interest in Neville?”

“I do; yet I am not sure I should like him. I fancy he could be cruel, or at least selfish. I imagine he might be all right to his men friends; but might he not be tyrannical to a wife?”

"My dear Miss Delvigne!" cried her startled duenna.

"Oh! do let me talk my own way for once," cried Miss Delvigne impatiently. "I am not speaking treason."

"Yes! treason against my favorite comrade," said Sir Frederic, smiling, and a good deal surprised. "I should like to know your idea of a good fellow."

"I don't know about fellows, but I know what is good in a girl, and I suppose it is pretty much the same. One who can be true as steel, and secret as the grave—who is cool and indifferent to people in general, but has a world of warmth and sympathy and devotion for the few she loves! Is your friend worthy of such a girl as this?" cried the New Orleans heiress, her pale cheek flushing, and her rather sad eyes looking straight into Compton's, with a light in them that gave her a momentary beauty.

"I suppose there are not many men really worthy of the woman you describe, who is, by the way, tolerably scarce, I imagine," returned Sir Frederic, looking at her with surprise and admiration. "But Neville is not undeserving of such a woman, and he will—I mean he would be—all the better for her companionship." He gave a slight nod and peculiar glance as he said this, which conveyed to his hearer the conviction that he understood the object of her re-

marks, and added, in a lower tone and with some emphasis, "Believe me, Neville will not fail those who trust him."

"*Tout mieux*," said Miss Delvigne in the same tone, as if a little ashamed of the enthusiasm with which she had spoken.

"You have conjured up a delightful picture," resumed Compton, forgetting the presence of Miss Green, for the fire and boldness of the little French governess, as he thought her, had roused him and stirred his blood. "I shall dream of such a girl as you describe for many a day to come, and imagine the fancy that can paint such a picture must be inspired by a similar nature," stealing a look into her eyes.

"Pooh! nonsense," returned Miss Delvigne, with a piquant little "mou"; "it is all very well to say that, but I dare say you are laughing at me in your sleeve as a romantic, gushing school-girl! But I do not care if you do!"—defiantly—"I have my own ideas and I shall stick to them."

"Laugh at you!" cried Compton, "you know very well I shall do nothing of the kind! you know that I shall think of your words and hear the ring of your tones—"

"My dear Miss Delvigne," interrupted the English governess hastily, with ill concealed uneasiness, "if we do not hurry on, you will not reach Saratoga Lodge in time for dinner."

"Saratoga Lodge!" repeated Sir Frederic. "Are you going to dine with Mrs. Coleman? What a sell! she invited me, and I refused! I suppose I cannot go and retract at the eleventh hour! I did not know you were on such intimate terms with her."

"I am not, but one of the girls—Evalina, I think—wants to learn some especial *appliqué* work, and I promised to teach her, so they invited me to dinner."

"Well, next time I am asked I shall not refuse; perhaps I shall have the pleasure of meeting you."

"It is very unlikely; and now, as you would not dine with Mrs. Coleman, I think you had better not come in sight of her windows. I will say good-by here."

"Yes, certainly it would be much more prudent," cried Miss Green.

"But stay a moment," exclaimed Sir Frederic; "am I not to have the pleasure of seeing you again?—or—"

"That is impossible to say! For the present I must bid you good-morning!"

"For the present, then," said he very significantly; and, raising his hat, he allowed the two ladies to pass on, and then stood looking after them, with a curious, eager desire to overtake them and renew his conversation with that composed, daring, piquante, original little French governess.

"She is not exactly pretty, but what eyes she has when they light up, and what a sweet little disdainful mouth ! Pooh ! what an idiot I am to think about her ! But I should like to have another chat with her. How shall I manage it?"

He little thought how soon, and under what circumstances, the desired meeting would come about.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE bright morning about a week after this conversation a cab, with a single box and a single inmate, drew up to the footway of the Edgware Road, near to where was the once famous gate of Tyburn. Close by stood a brougham and pair, and a soldierly, distinguished-looking man was strolling up and down, with an air of repressed impatience and expectation. The cab drew up; the watcher rushed to open the door, and emancipated a young lady, with pale cheeks and large, lustrous eyes, suffused with tears, and otherwise evincing emotion in her bearing. Neville, who was of course the gentleman in waiting, however, hastily handed her into the brougham, paid the cabman, saw the box transferred to his own conveyance, and, ordering the coachman to drive fast, stepped in, and they were off at a rapid pace across the Park. In a few minutes, it seemed to Marie Delvigne, they stopped before the entrance to Kensington Church. Here stood Sir Frederic Compton, the faithful Simmons, and a respectable-looking female, suitably attired, of an uncertain age.

The young Baronet felt no small curiosity as his friend descended from the carriage, and paused to hand out his fair companion.

She was simply dressed in blue-and-white, and a bewitching little bonnet of straw and lace and corn-flowers seemed made for her face, and the face for the bonnet.

She was a woman of whom any man might be proud, and Neville thrilled with triumph as he said,—

“Let me present my friend, Sir Frederic Compton, to you.”

The Baronet bowed profoundly.

“I am to act as father,” he said, smiling, “on this happy occasion: I may truly add, it is the proudest moment of my life.”

But poor Marie Delvigne was impervious to jests; she was mentally and physically trembling. Delicately organized, she was loving, shy, passionate, brave—the very type of a true woman’s nature. In the quiet of her own room she had contemplated the step she was to take with mingled fear and delight. She had neither father, mother, family, nor home to break away from; life had been hard and lonely to her, nor did it offer much of hope or brightness;—why, then, should she reject the loving offer of a strong, tender, honorable protector? But now that she realized what it was to come *alone* to her wedding, she felt too terrified and ashamed

of her own boldness to show her shame. Hope, fear, past, present, and future, all centred in the man whom a few minutes more would be her lord legally, as he was already really the master of her fate.

"Wheeler," said Neville, addressing the orthodox female above mentioned, "this is your mistress."

Wheeler dropped a respectful courtesy. The sight of a female was wondrously comforting to our young friend.

Another half hour and the irrevocable words were spoken, the necessary signatures made, and Compton was wishing them joy at the church gate.

"Keep him in order, Mrs. Neville," he said ; "I assure you it is very pleasant to think that I shall have a friend in his commanding officer."

What a strange thrill of delight and security these few words gave her. "Mrs. Neville!" Yes ; she was his in the sight of God and man. Her fondness, obedience, devotion, were sacred duties ; she bore his honored name, and was one with him ! A holy joy lit up her eyes ; a soft color tinged her cheek. In her supreme happiness she would have gently patronized royalty itself.

"You shall be my friend, as you have been his," she said, giving her hand to the young Baronet.

"You are the luckiest dog in Christendom," whispered Sir Frederic to his ally, as he sprang into the carriage, after seeing the abigail safely seated on the box; and they were away to London Bridge.

It was a dull, drizzling day, not actively cold, but chilly, with a heavy dampness that crept into the marrow and checked the currents of circulation.

Sir Frederic looked after the carriage, and sighed slightly as it disappeared, then whistled part of an air while he drew on his gloves.

It is not easy to witness intense happiness without a certain sad feeling—a kind of left-in-the-lurch sensation, which is not cheerful, especially when you have no particular occupation or pursuit.

"So it's all finished, and they are absolutely 'linked,'" he mused. "I hope it will turn out well; but we have been in a devil of a hurry. Neville's a good fellow, though; he'll be kind to her, and she—"

"There's a sixpence for you," he said aloud, interrupting the current of his thoughts, and addressing a scarecrow object with a broom in his hand, which, scenting a wedding from afar, had scrambled to the gateway in hopes of coming in for something; so he stepped into his cab and drove, still thoughtful, to Morley's, having no particular duty to perform at the barracks.

"Mr. Foster has only just driven off, sir," said the waiter on his return, "and left word he would call again about two."

"The deuce he did!" uttered the perplexed young man. "What is to be done now?"

Meantime the bride and bridegroom were speeding towards their destination. Marie leant back, her face covered with her handkerchief, and one hand clasped in Neville's, while he, not liking to break in upon her reflections, fell himself into a confused, pleasant train of musing. He had played out the game, and was successful. No more difficulties for him; but a fair home, with a ministering angel to preside over it, and cherish and look after him. An elegant-looking creature, too—a credit to his taste! At this idea he pressed the hand that lay in his, which gently returned the pressure, "and loving him so devotedly." Well, he would make her a capital husband.

"I wonder what old Foster will do! Well, he can't do much, or take her from me. By Jove! I'd like to see the man that would dare come between us!" and he stole an arm round her, when the carriage suddenly stopped in one of those narrow, wretched streets between Waterloo and London Bridges, through which, as through some horrid, unsubstantial dream, travellers are hurried.

"What's the matter?" cried Neville, while Marie started with sudden fear.

"Horse down in front, sir. Can't get round no way."

"What a nuisance!" exclaimed Neville. "We shall miss the train."

He sprang out instinctively to assist, either with hands or head, the prostrate animal.

It was a difficult matter. The creature was entangled in the harness—strong and terrified; and it was ten minutes' work to extricate him. He was then too much injured to drag away the cart, and a further delay occurred before it could be moved.

Marie's heart beat painfully till they proceeded on their way. But the mischief had been done, and the Dover train gone some minutes before they reached the station.

"An hour to wait," said Neville, seating himself by his bride. "What a bore! Shall I get you a book? Or, stay! you must want some luncheon. Come! let us see what they have in the refreshment-room."

"I do not feel inclined either to read or eat," said Marie, with a sweet, shy smile, looking into Neville's eyes for the first time since they were man and wife.

And he felt it hard, indeed, to be surrounded by witnesses at such a moment.

"Nevertheless you must take something," he

said. "It shall be my first exercise of authority. Wheeler, *your* appetite has not been taken away by this morning's performance?" and he led them into the refreshment-room.

Then he remembered the possible chance of some passer-by recognizing his bride, and hurried her to the ladies' waiting-room. It was vacant, so he sat down awhile by her.

"What will Miss Redoubt say?" he asked, in an exulting whisper.

"Oh, nothing till Thursday. She will think I am with Madame Lacordeille; I often go there."

"Ah, yes! your Southern friend at Bayswater; then we have a clear start till Thursday."

The minutes slipped by. At last it was time to take their places. But the train was crowded, and the married lovers had to endure the presence of a fast young man, armed with "Bell's Life," and redolent of tobacco; an elderly female, with a snarling pet pug; and an old red-faced gentleman, who waged a continuous warfare with this latter personage on the score of opening and shutting windows. Of course the intercourse between Neville and his wife was limited to glances, and silent attentions on his part, while he watched, with the utmost solicitude, the pale cheek and drooping eyelids of the fair girl, whose protector he was henceforth to be.

The train stopped everywhere, and it was six

o'clock before they reached the hospitable portals of the "Lord Warden."

"If you will please give me your keys, I will put out your things, 'm, while the Captain's ordering dinner," said Mrs. Wheeler, anxious to be up and doing. "This is your room, 'm."

"Thank you," said Marie, following her, bewildered at this new phase of life and by her own sudden importance.

It was new and delightful to have her bonnet removed, her brushes and combs placed in her hands, and all the numberless personal services offered that an adroit lady's-maid knows how to perform.

"I'm sure, 'm," continued Wheeler, "I am wishing you all happiness! You have twisted up your hair beautiful. You'll not want much hair-dressing from me, 'm, though I always gave the best of satisfaction when I lived with Lady Frederic Hauton, likewise the Honorable Mrs. Prendergast."

This was uttered with a sort of quiet volubility, as though the speaker was rather overpowered by the dignity of her hearer. Mrs. Wheeler was a fair type of her class—tall, thin, keen, and respectable.

"Thank you," said her young mistress gently. "Did Captain Neville engage you himself for me?"

"Yes, 'm; my cousin, as is valet to Sir Fred-

eric Compton, he sent for me, and after waiting a bit in the hotel the Captain saw me himself, and engaged me."

"I am very much obliged to him," said Marie, radiant at this proof of his thoughtful love.

Glancing once more at the pleasant image reflected in the glass, she left the chamber, and hesitated at the door of the sitting-room in her shy embarrassment. Smiling at her own foolishness, she opened it, and Neville, turning at the sound, came to meet her, and drew her towards the window, which gave rather a melancholy view over the dull, leaden sea, where the moaning, rising wind was cresting the sullen waves with foam, and all looked bleak and stormy.

Neville did not speak. At last—at last—after such prolonged restraint—they were together and alone! He gazed into her eyes, where he read so much of deprecating tenderness, at the red lips, parted and tremulous with such deep feeling, that his passionate love and delight took a gentler and more earnest tone. Here was something more than he had ever met before; a "holy of holies" such as he had never entered! A feeling like a prayer gleamed for a moment across his heart, and then all thoughts merged in the intense rapture with which he clasped his arms round the lithe figure, and, fondly pressing his lips to hers, held her in a long embrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

HIGHLY intellectual persons might deem the conversation which ensued, and which lent the hours wings for our entranced pair, of the most desultory and unconnected description. Neville was too much engrossed by the present to bestow much thought how his bride would take the revelation that her innocent artifice was penetrated, and let her draw him into reminiscences of his past life—adventures in many lands—led on irresistibly by the magic of knowing his words were pearls and diamonds of eloquence to his admiring listener.

Dinner was over, and the cloth removed, when the waiter returned, bearing an ominous envelope having mysterious red insignia stamped upon it. Neville read it over two or three times—mused, pulled his mustaches, and finally looking up with a smile, exclaimed, "I am afraid, Marie, we must cross by the mail boat to-night; I find from this telegram that it would be scarcely safe to remain."

Marie glanced at the view from the window; the sea was dull and angry looking, and even by the fast-fading light could be seen flecked over

with foam crests, as it dashed, raging and thundering, against the pier. She shuddered at the prospect.

"Why may we not stay here—we are so happy?" she murmured; "*must* we go, dear Guy?"

"Well, you see, love, the fact is, I should not be in such a hurry, only—this telegram is from Compton, to say old Foster had returned, and though he cannot do us much harm I should not like to have our happiness broken in upon even for an hour; still I think we might venture to wait till to-morrow. He says—" and Neville, full of his subject, and forgetting the part he and his bride were acting, took the telegram from his pocket, and read—

" 'Grandfather returned—all safe as yet—does not go to St. John's Wood till Wednesday.' 'I think we are pretty safe, thanks to your capital dodge of going to stay with your friends.' "

"O yes!" said Marie; but she spoke it in uncertain tones, and paused with a puzzled look. "Let me read it," she resumed, stretching out her hand for the paper.

Neville gave it to her with an anxious thought—"Have I unmasked the game too soon? What will she do or say next?"

"I am afraid there is some mistake somewhere. Is not Sir Frederic's grandfather old Mr. Foster?"

"Yes," said Neville, almost breathlessly.

"Are you any relation of his, or what has he to do with it?" she asked gently.

"She is too good an actress by half," thought Neville.

"Oh!" he returned, hesitatingly; "you see he is guardian to— Marie," he exclaimed, abruptly interrupting himself, "do not let us carry on this farce any longer. Now that you know how fondly and passionately I love you, you will understand that to win you more quickly I affected to be duped by your little plot. Time will show that I love you for your self alone. I know which Miss Delvigne I have married, and—"

A low wail of agony interrupted him.

"Oh, Guy, Guy!—I see it all! You have mistaken me for my friend—for the heiress—and I—I am nothing, and have nothing!"

"Come, come. You need not keep up the farce any longer."

But Neville spoke huskily and anxiously.

"Guy Neville," she replied, with some solemnity, "I am Marie Delvigne, daughter of Pierre Delvigne, *officier* in the French army, and his wife, Mary Ward, an Englishwoman. I was educated in Paris to be a teacher. How have you mistaken me?"

"By Heaven," cried Neville fiercely, "you have deceived me!"

"Oh! no, no, no!" she cried frantically; "I

always told you who and what I was. How could you—how did you mistake me?"

"But did you not agree with that other Miss Delvigne to change places—to pass as the French teacher at Mrs. Coleman's?"

"Never—never—yet!—I remember Marie proposed we should, but I refused—indeed I refused! How did you know it? Oh! Guy—Guy—what will become of me?" and she sank despairingly on her knees, hiding her face in the sofa cushions.

"By Heaven," exclaimed Neville, after walking up and down the room, and stopping within a few paces of the crouched and humiliated form of his wife, "I cannot fathom it. You have in some way deceived me, but you have gained very little. I was almost a ruined man when I first had the misfortune to behold you, and now this affair will finish me, adding to the difficulty of supporting myself the burden of a wife;" and, laughing scornfully, he resumed his angry walking to and fro. "Turn where I will," he continued, "ruin stares me in the face. If I had been less blinded by your grace and beauty!—God! it is a frightful position!"

"Then you did love me for a while! You did care for me at first," gasped the wretched Marie, straining with woman-like desperation for the last glimpse of Love's Light. "It was not altogether because you thought I had money.

Oh! would to God I had thousands for you, Guy!"

"But you have not," was the cruel answer. "Marie! if I find, as I suspect, that you have deceived me—"

But the coarser tone roused Marie's pride. She rose, and putting back the hair from her poor, dry, aching eyes, said, with blanched, trembling lips, and parching tongue, that could hardly articulate: "I have never deceived you—I have never deceived any one. Look at me—you must read truth in my eyes;—and, Guy, I will be no burden to you. I do not understand your laws; but I will help you to undo our marriage! I will set you free. I will be no burden to you!"

Neville looked sternly at her. "You do not know what childish nonsense you are talking," he said; "nothing but death can break our marriage, and I wish to God it would come."

"Oh! Guy, Guy," and again the unhappy girl threw herself on her knees, and hid her face anywhere out of sight. What was she to have thus interfered with the career of so great a man and hero? For, all keen to sympathize with her idol, though writhing with unutterable agony at the blight which had fallen on herself, her thought was of him—for him! She never dreamed of turning on him with reproaches for his fortune-hunting schemes! Oh, what whirl-

ing drifts of sorrow swept one over another through the aching brain! The heaven of this morning swept away, and instead clouds and thick darkness—yea, darkness that might be felt! Meantime, Neville paced up and down the room, brooding silently; then suddenly seizing a "Bradshaw" he studied it for a few moments, with fierce brow and compressed lip.

"Listen to me," he said at last composedly, but with a coldness even more annihilating than his previous fury; "and pray get up; these theatrical attitudes do not impress me at all. I shall, in time, know whether you have deliberately deceived me or not. Meanwhile, I have much to arrange in London. I must see Compton. In short, I must go to town by the next train; you must remain here. I shall return to-morrow evening at farthest, and let you know my plans. Compose yourself," for she had risen, and was sitting helplessly, with dishevelled hair, on the sofa. "I am going to ring for the waiter."

He did so, and profound silence reigned till that functionary appeared.

"I am called suddenly to town," said Neville, in his cool, commanding tones, all hurry and emotion checked by the presence of an inferior; "but Mrs. Neville"—his brow contracted at the word—"and her maid remain. I shall return to-morrow night."

The waiter bowed, and retired.

Neville hesitated a moment, and turned to leave the room.

"Guy! Guy!" cried Marie, rising with clasped hands. "Hear me—do not leave me without one kind word or look! I too am suffering."

"I know not what to think," returned her husband gloomily; "there is no time for discussion now. Be rational, and do not delay me."

And turning from the imploring face, he hastily left the room. She dared not follow him. She heard his voice speaking to Mrs. Wheeler. She vaguely caught the sense of his words—something of an unexpected summons and preparation; then a dull cloud came down over her faculties. She heard the roar and clang of the sea, the vague sound of music from below, and she seemed dimly learning the pattern of the paper on the wall opposite by heart. Then the noise of hastily-closed doors shook her soul; and next, that of the room in which she sat opened, and the respectable Wheeler entered, in neat, irreproachable attire.

"The Captain is called away very sudden," she said, in tones sufficiently respectful, yet altered in some mysterious way from those of the morning. "It is a trial for you, 'm!"

"O yes!" returned Marie, her large eyes gazing expressionlessly. "It is a great trial," and her slender fingers twined themselves together convulsively; her throat was dry; she could

scarce articulate. What was this that had happened? What had hurled her from the rapture, the repose, the paradise of an hour ago, to the agony and shame and bewilderment of the present? No fault of hers—she was true and loving and faithful; and now she was alone! And this respectable woman—should she speak to her, would she too despise and reject her as her beloved, her trusted, adored idol had done? But nature decided for her. The racked nerves could hold out no longer. She was too young and strong and healthy to faint, so a great burst of tears came to her relief, and it was hopeless to play a part any longer before the keen optics of her companion.

“Wheeler,” said she, “I will not deceive you. Captain Neville has married me, believing I was an heiress, through some unfortunate mistake. I have nothing, and oh! what is to become of me?”

The experienced Wheeler, though not given to the melting mood, was but human after all, and could not resist the infection of this agonized outburst.

“Mistake!” she exclaimed, “how could there be a mistake? Don’t you take on so, ’m. You are his lawful, wedded wife. I am a witness, and he must support you. It isn’t at all right of him to go off and leave you here. What are we to do?”

"Hush!" returned Marie, with quiet dignity. "You must not say a word against Captain Neville; but you are right—what are we to do? Let me think."

And, rising from the sofa, she threw herself into a chair by the window, rested her head on her hands, and gazed out despairingly over the desolate, heaving, moaning waste of waters before her. "What was she to do?" and the rebel brain, instead of setting obediently to work to answer this puzzling query, began diligently to rehearse the tender, loving passages of the last month—the heaven of safety, rest, and joy which had been wrenched from her a short hour ago. Did I say a short hour? Well, some indefinite period, which to her was past, present, future, all in one!

"Wheeler," she said, at length, "I think I had better give you your wages, and let you go. Whatever becomes of me, I shall not require a lady's-maid."

"Well, 'm, as you please, and being in such trouble, I'll not go for to speak as to my own disappointment and loss; for I give up a respectable position to take your place. But if you'll take my advice you'll just stay here till your husband comes back, and don't commit yourself to nothink anyways. Sir Frederic Compton will do something for us—he is such a rich young gentleman. My cousin's his valet,

and tells me he is a deal mixed up with it. Law! 'm, however did the Captain come to make the mistake?"

Her mistress's misfortunes excited Mrs. Wheeler into a wonderful amount of familiarity and curiosity in so composed a personage.

"I cannot tell—I cannot think or speak. I am sick, sick at heart," and the unhappy girl burst into another agony of weeping, more intense and prolonged than the first, and Wheeler, after some ineffectual suggestions not "to take on so," "the mischief was done," etc., remembered it was close on the tea hour, and that there was a numerous and agreeable party at the servants' ordinary; so, after a look of compassion, not unmixed with contempt, at the weeping figure by the window, she left the room.

Her absence was a relief to Marie, who, starting up, began to pace the room, sometimes pressing her hands to her brow. To remain a burden to Neville—a hated burden—hampering his movements and crippling his resources. No! a thousand times, no! She would not cost him a penny, nor punish him with her presence. Hereafter, when worn with sorrow and exhausted by the loneliness of life, death came, she would perhaps send for Neville, and once more resting in those beloved arms, pass away from being a grief and a trouble, and then his grave eyes might look kindly and lovingly on her.

Poor thing! the touching picture raised a storm of sobs; it was very dramatic and effective, and she would have gladly realized it on the spot, but then she was only nineteen, and almost distraught.

But these dreams would not do; again she roused herself, and after a few moments' silent, fervent prayer, went to her room, and began mechanically to replace the things which Wheeler had taken out, in her box, carefully laying a black silk dress at the top. Then she thought long and earnestly; the desperation of her circumstances, the wild longing to escape, to hide, like some stricken creature that only seeks to die unseen, gave her resolution and invention. She matured in her mind a plan to elude pursuit, if pursuit were made; and finally, after pacing her room in the restless agony of mingled shame, grief, and fruitless self-accusation, for the facility with which she had yielded to Neville's persuasion, she threw herself on her bed, and found some moments of oblivion, which only made her waking more terrible.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN, actuated by some kindness and a good deal of curiosity, Wheeler brought her young mistress a cup of coffee the next morning—not too early, for where was the need of hurry?—she found the bird flown. Many were the conjectures to which this disappearance gave rise. Perhaps she had gone to commit suicide, to pursue Captain Neville, to appeal to Sir Frederic? “Anyhow, she is a silly not to take me with her, if that is her game,” was the excellent Wheeler’s conclusion, as she descended to her own breakfast, and a comfortable talk in the servants’ room.

Meantime Marie had sallied forth alone, at first with a strange, giddy feeling of bewilderment and terrible strangeness; then, growing more composed in the air, she stopped and inquired her way to the principal street for shops.

Every step of that weary way was indelibly printed on her memory—the cry of the sailors who were hauling up a sail, the stand of little open carriages near the ship, the groups of men, half-workmen, half-sailors, whom she encountered. Finally, she reached Snargate Street, and,

• slackening her pace, looked earnestly into the shop windows ; at length she selected one, and, after a short parley, became the purchaser of a little, quiet, elderly-looking bonnet of black and violet, which was put into a capacious paper bag. At another shop she bought a cheap black Barège shawl, which she also put into the paper bag, and then walked rapidly back to the hotel, regaining her room before Mrs. Wheeler had time to finish her protracted gossip.

Marie, therefore, completed her arrangements, locked her box, put on its cover carefully and methodically ; and then proceeding to the sitting-room wrote a few lines, frequently stopping to wipe away the fast-falling tears. This accomplished, she paused a moment to recover herself, and then summoned Wheeler.

"Well, 'm, I am sure you are right to take a mouthful of fresh air, just to rouse yourself. You see you need not give way, for—"

"Wheeler," said her young mistress slowly, with a sort of despondent heaviness in her voice, "I am going away to my friends. They will advise me. Give this note to Captain Neville when he returns ; it will explain all to him ; and, Wheeler, what wages were you to receive?"

After some circumlocution the waiting-maid explained, and received two bright sovereigns from poor Marie's slender store.

"The train will leave in about ten minutes," resumed Marie; "have my box carried down."

Wheeler tried to remonstrate, but Marie imposed silence upon her; and the people of the hotel putting no obstacle in the way, she took her place unmolested, to Wheeler's astonishment and horror, in a second-class carriage.

"I suppose the lady will be in London by midday?" asked Mrs. Wheeler of the porter who had had the care of Marie's box.

"London!" he replied, "why, she is only going to Folkestone; leastways, her box was labelled to Folkestone. They'll be there in half an hour."

"Folkestone," repeated Wheeler; "she'll be going to her relations in France, then. Well, that'll be some news for the Captain, anyway; he'll be wanting trace of her, and the more I have to tell, the better."

Meantime, poor Marie sped along, and shouts of "Folkestone! Folkestone!" startled her before she had well realized the desolate sense of freedom from Wheeler's prying eyes. She had made the short transit alone, and instead of a girl in light gloves and a gay bonnet, there stepped from the carriage a lady in black dress, shawl, and gloves, a black and violet bonnet, and a thick black veil, scrupulously fastened down.

"When will the tidal up-train start?" she asked of an official.

"In about an hour, ma'am. Passengers are having their luggage examined now."

Marie had her box carried into a deserted ladies' waiting-room—abandoned to dust, flies, and cobwebs, where an empty water-bottle stood in the centre of a thirsty-looking oaken table—and in unenvied loneliness opened and re-arranged its contents. It was once more ready for the road and labelled, her own ticket (first-class this time) purchased, and she had shivered for what seemed to her an interminable time on the platform, before the tardy train made its appearance. She was hastily thrust into a carriage, and left alone with a grave, iron-gray, supremely respectable-looking gentleman, who was reading a pamphlet, and whose accessories of travel—courier's bag, writing-desk, etc., of the plainest but most costly description—lay on the seat opposite. Of him poor Marie took little heed. Fairly launched upon her lonely journey, its appalling desolation seemed to strike and overwhelm her, though still too excited to realize its difficulties. Where was she going? What was she to do? But above all rose the agonizing thought that Guy—her peerless Guy—had only sought her for what gain she could bring him. Oh! base, base! and she should never see him more! How her eyes yearned for one more glimpse!—her lips thirsted for one more kiss from him who was but yesterday her honored

and adoring husband ! She wept with passionate intensity, and so long did the agony last, that her companion, who had from time to time cast curious glances towards her, put down his pamphlet, moved uneasily on his seat, and "hemmed" once or twice portentously. At length, opening a sandwich case, he took from it a bottle, the lower part of which fitted into a silver cup, and pouring out some of the contents, approached her.

"Allow me," he said, in dry, cold tones, "young lady, to offer you a little sherry ; if you continue to weep to such a degree you will do yourself harm—'the spirit may be willing, though the flesh is weak'—this slight refreshment will strengthen you."

"Thank you," said Marie, grateful in her desolation for any crumb of comfort ; and she drank the wine.

The gentleman looked pleased ; and, wiping the cup carefully with a small, fine damask napkin, replaced the bottle, and locked the sandwich case very methodically, keeping his seat near our heroine.

"Hem," he resumed, "the spirit may be willing to submit to sorrow, but the flesh weak to support spiritual trials. Far be it from me to obtrude myself on such sorrow as yours, but suffer me in a brotherly spirit to ask, do you know where to turn for comfort?"

"Indeed, I do not!" exclaimed Marie, with sad earnestness; whereupon her companion entered into an elaborate exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith; during which Marie's thoughts wandered to St. John's Wood, the routine of school, and her comparative happiness there—of the dismay her friend and namesake would experience when she knew the tragedy which had befallen—of the rage of Miss Redoubt, until, recalling her thoughts by an effort, she caught the last words of her companion's harangue.

"Thus, however deeply dyed may be the sinner, the alternative of forgiveness or destruction is offered."

"But," exclaimed Marie, conscious, poor child, of having been so much more sinned against than sinning, "I have not done wrong—not intentionally!"

"Pardon me," returned the iron-gray man, "those words prove the immeasurable distance you are from truth;" and he again plunged into a doctrinal disquisition, from which Marie's thoughts soon wandered.

"All this," her companion was saying when she again listened to him, "seems strange, no doubt, in your present frame of mind; but do not, I beseech you, let my words pass from your memory. We know not what merciful design may have thrown us together."

"You are very, very kind to try and comfort me," said Marie, with sad meekness; "and I believe you have done me good."

The stranger looked compassionately at her out of his keen, cold, gray-blue eyes.

"You have friends to meet you at London Bridge, I presume?" he said.

Marie shook her head. "I have no friends or relations here. I have come to England to earn my bread, and scarce know how to set about seeking it."

"Ah!" returned her questioner, "I thought you were not English; but I fear, if you have neither friends nor recommendations, you will find it very hard to make out a living."

"God will help me," said Marie, with vague piety, feeling that she must not betray herself too far.

The gentleman appeared anxious to find out some more particulars of her story; but she baffled him by a simple pertinacity.

"I do not wish to say anything more about myself, even to one so kind as you are," she said.

"Far be it from me to intrude," returned the stranger, with a shade more coldness; "but should you want help, and feel your story will bear examination (and, remember, I will sift it thoroughly), write or come to me at that address,"—and he wrote with pencil on a slip of paper, in clear, business-like characters: "Mr.

Watson, Youths' Evangelical Reformatory Institution, Pelham Road, Kennington."

"I thank you," said Marie; "I shall keep it in memory of you, though we shall probably never meet again."

"Hem," said her companion, relapsing into rather gloomy silence, possibly mortified at the ill-success of his philanthropy.

Trains passed in more rapid succession, houses grew thicker, tickets were taken, and they rushed, panting and shrieking, into the London Bridge Terminus.

"Can I do anything for you? - Direct you to an hotel?"

"No, I thank you. Nothing!"

CHAPTER X.

IT was unusual to see Sir Frederic Compton descend the stairs at Morley's before noon. However, there he was, fully attired, and stepping into a "hansom," as the hand of the clock reached 10.30 on the morning after the disastrous disclosure in our last chapter.

He had a downcast, though resolved, air ; his bright black eyes looked sad, and the very tones in which he gave some parting directions to his servant had in them an unwonted heaviness.

"To No. —, Mecklenburgh Square."

And the horse's head was turned in a direction opposite to that usually taken by horses in Sir Frederic Compton's employ, for he was more wont to receive than to pay visits to his grandfather.

Mr. Foster piqued himself on being the type and model of a British merchant—"all of the olden time"—and abjured modern habits, unless specially comfortable, and modern speculations, unless extra safe and profitable ; affected simplicity of manners, and ostentatiously boasted his humble position, while he adored tufts in his inmost heart, and deferred to his own grandson because he had a handle to his name.

He lived in a spacious house in Mecklenburgh Square ; wore a blue coat with a velvet collar, a yellow waistcoat, and a shirt frill ; and piqued himself on his old-fashioned politeness.

He had risen from an elaborately set-out breakfast-table, and was in the act of drawing on his gloves (doe-skin), while a butler, of splendid proportions and funeral aspect, held his hat, when another servant announced—"Sir Frederic Compton."

"Eh? what? My dear boy,"—and his lips extended to a complimentary simper, which displayed a brilliant set of teeth, first-rate in cost and quality.

"It is so difficult to find you young men of fashion, that I have almost given up the idea of calling at Morley's, though I have been anxious to see you and hear—Eh? what's the matter, Sir Fred? You don't look quite the thing."

"Oh, I am all right myself, sir ; but—ah!—in short, I am rather in the blues about my chum Neville. I—but let us go into your study : I want to speak to you."

"Ah! God bless my soul! You haven't—you haven't been lending him money? Come along."

And he proceeded to a room on the opposite side of the hall. A melancholy apartment, with a dusky Turkey carpet, fitted with dark-polished oak, bronze ornaments, and a goodly array of

solemn tomes in rich, sombre bindings. There was an inkstand on the table, but the ink was dried up, and the pens split.

"Sit down, my dear boy—sit down," said Mr. Foster, rather fussily, and looking at his watch. "I have an especial appointment this morning, and can give you but a few minutes, so just let me know your errand at once."

"Well, sir," began the embarrassed young Baronet, who had been diligently rehearsing "beginnings" since he first woke, and now found them all melting away at the critical moment, "I want you to do my friend Neville a good turn with his brother, who will not refuse *you* a favor. You see, Neville has been going rather fast, and now he has made a foolish marriage in hopes of extricating himself, and is going to sell his commission, and thinks of emigrating; so if you would give him a berth in the Bank, even five or six hundred a year, I would be greatly obliged."

Here Sir Frederic stopped abruptly, feeling he had but opened the approaches.

"Ah! hum. My dear Fred, your explanation is hardly clear. Your friend has made an imprudent marriage in hopes of bettering himself—a curious method, eh?"

"I mean," interrupted the Baronet, "he has been playing rather high."

"A gambler!" repeated Mr. Foster, aghast

with virtuous indignation. "Admit a gambler into the Bank? You are not serious, Sir Frederic?"

"But, grandfather, what is the poor fellow to do?—and his wife a beautiful girl."

"Well, I suppose Captain Neville understood his own position, and is certainly old enough to take care of himself. What business had he to make an imprudent marriage? and what induces you to take such an interest in him? There is something under all this," added the banker, with more shrewdness than might be expected from his constant simper and fussy manner.

"Well, sir, he was always a great ally of mine," exclaimed the warm-hearted young man; "and, in short," he continued, rushing into it, "his marriage was all my fault, and I must stick by him."

"Your fault?" exclaimed Mr. Foster, turning pale with sudden apprehension. "But you said an *imprudent* marriage. Who—who is the lady?"

"I am in for it now," thought Sir Frederic. "Her name was Delvigne," he said slowly.

"Delvigne? Ha!" returned Mr. Foster. "What, the French teacher?"

The Baronet bowed.

"Hum! ah! Curious circumstance. Same name, eh? My dear boy, he fancied he had trapped the heiress; is it so? Ha! ha! ha!—

the biter bit—a very facetious occurrence. But stay, Fred. How was it your fault? You could not have misled him? *That* would be too dangerous a joke. *You* knew which was which, I suppose?”

“Faith! I did not, sir; and there’s the mischief.”

“Why, Sir Frederic, I shall begin to fancy you wanted to help him to the wife I had intended for you.”

“Just so, sir,” returned Compton, restored to self-possession by the revelation. “Hear me, my dear grandfather. I was, as you must be well aware, much averse to matrimony of any kind. I knew you would have to look out another husband for your ward, if I would not marry her. Neville is a capital fellow, and would be a steady one, if he had a chance—a well-born gentleman, and in love with the girl, who had money enough for both. By Jove! I thought I was securing her happiness and my own freedom by the same stroke. So I took Neville to Mrs. Coleman’s, and the governess was so deucedly handsome and *distinguee* we both took her for the heiress. And then your note, sir! ‘Gad! it’s *your* doing, after all; but for that, Neville would have believed her when she said she was the teacher.”

“Do not talk to me, sir,” interrupted the Banker, seriously angry with his fashionable

grandson for the first time in his life. "It was an unprincipled plot, and would have disgraced you had it succeeded. To deceive your nearest relative and—"

"As to you, sir, I am really sorry, and apologize. But the girl would have been all right with Neville; at least, your ward would. I am not sure that it won't go hard with poor Marie. Neville was in a devil of a mood last night, fancying she had somehow deceived him. But look, sir," continued Compton, gathering courage as he proceeded, "how much worse it might have been! Neville might have carried off your ward, and then ten to one but I would have married the governess. I can tell you, I was half in love with her as it was; and your note, sir!—Come! that was at the bottom of the mischief."

"It was the saving of us," murmured Mr. Foster; "and now to come to me to assist this unprincipled scamp of a friend of yours! Really it is audacious!"

"Remember what might have been. Come, my dear grandfather, try and forgive me; you know the heiress is still available. Do think if you can't give Neville a lift. Let me lend him the capital to put into your concern, and I'll answer for his steadiness. He is the soul of honor: and—come now—I see you are in a hurry—do me the favor of dining with me to-day, and we will talk the matter over more calmly."

The old man was always flattered by an invitation from his grandson, and said, with a pleased laugh—

“I am too old for so gay a man as you, Sir Fred. Besides, my partner, your friend’s brother, who was with me in Paris about that forgery matter which took me off so suddenly, could not leave with me, but was to return this afternoon, and will dine here to-day. I tell you what; come to dinner with me yourself, and then we will both attack him. He is a taciturn fellow, rather; but he might be induced to give Captain Neville a lift. And now I must go to the city: at 6.30 remember—not a moment later. But how,” he asked, “how did Neville find this out—that he had got hold of the wrong party; and you—when did you hear?”

“Why, you see, they were married yesterday, and I thought they were safe off to the Continent; when, on returning to the hotel after Lady Meredith’s ball, I found Neville pacing up and down like a madman. He had discovered all, and had rushed off to me. It was a nasty business, I assure you. I soothed him the best way I could, promised to see Cox about the sale of his commission, and persuaded him to return to his poor wife, whom I pity, ’pon my soul! He started this morning, and will bring her up to-night probably, when I hope to have some good news for him.”

"It was infamous—abominable—but—" began Mr. Foster.

"Did not succeed," put in the grandson. "Plenary absolution, if you please, sir, and 6.30 sharp for dinner. I'll be punctual. By Jove, sir, your port would induce a more careless fellow than myself to be up to time!"

"Be steady, my boy—be steady," said the old gentleman; and shaking his grandson's hand with renewed cordiality, he stepped into his brougham and drove off.

"Thank God, that's over!" said Sir Frederic to himself. "I must do all that's possible with the brother. Poor Neville! I couldn't leave him in the lurch after such a sell as that."

So thinking, he started in the direction of the Army Agent's to deliver a note from Neville, and put things *en train* for the sale of the commission, which they had fondly hoped had been averted.

CHAPTER XI.

TO Sir Frederic's disappointment he found, on reaching Mecklenburgh Square with the required punctuality, at 6.30, that he was to have a *tête-à-tête* dinner with Mr. Foster, Neville's formidable brother having been detained by a matter of business, and being obliged to await some information respecting a somewhat large forgery on the firm of Foster & Co.

Although Sir Frederic regretted the loss of so genial an opportunity as an after-dinner confabulation, he breathed more freely, and enjoyed the substantial fare set before him with a keener appetite.

The cloth had scarce been removed, when a sound of wheels pausing at the door, and the murmur of voices in question and answer, were heard. The next moment the grave butler presented a note, observing—

"Brought by your own man, Sir Frederic."

"From Neville!" cried the Baronet.

He opened and read—

"DEAR COMPTON,

"Come to me as soon as possible on receipt of this.

"In great agitation, yours,

"GUY NEVILLE."

Sir Frederic went out hastily into the hall.

"Is Captain Neville alone?" he asked of his servant.

"Yes, Sir Frederic."

"Ha—and at Morley's?"

"Yes, sir; and I have a cab to take you back."

"I will be with you directly," said his master, re-entering the dining-room. "I must leave you abruptly, sir," he said, addressing Mr. Foster. "Neville is in some new scrape, and wants me immediately."

"Really, Sir Fred! I do not see the necessity of your transforming yourself into Captain Neville's factotum and man-of business. Why not let him get out of his scrapes as he gets into them?"

"But, grandfather, *I* got him into them, and I'll pull him through if it is to be done. You are very angry, of course, I can't wonder; but I acted for the best; and if we had not made the mistake at starting—but I must not discuss it. Come, shake hands, sir, and forgive."

He gave his grandfather's hand a hearty pressure, and left him.

Neville was sitting at the table with some semblance of dinner before him when Sir Frederic entered the room. He looked haggard, dishevelled, and hard.

"Well," he said, "I have a new complication of difficulties. She's gone," he concluded, rising, and coming to his friend he wrung his hand—"she's gone."

"Who is gone, for Heaven's sake?"

"Marie—my wife. This is the mode she has taken to prove her sincerity! Yet," and his tone softened, "I fear I was hasty. God only knows to what desperate step I may not have driven her."

"But how?" urged Sir Frederic. "What's this?"

"When I arrived this morning at Dover," returned Neville, "the maid, Wheeler, met me with a face a yard long, and told me that Marie had left about two hours before, saying she would go to her friends, and leaving me this note, enclosing her wedding ring;" and Neville's voice broke as he threw the little packet on the table.

"May I read it?" asked the young Baronet, in a low tone.

"Yes—read," said Neville hastily.

"MY OWN DEAR GUY,

"I have thought intensely what is best for

me to do, and I have decided. Forget that you ever made the fatal mistake of marrying me. I return you my ring, the only token of our short union I possess. You shall never hear of me more—you shall never be burdened by me in any way. Surely your laws cannot hold such a marriage to be binding. Think of me as dead to you; but remember I never, never deceived you. You will find this out in time and acquit me.

“But, Guy, I loved—ay, still love you fondly! None will ever love you better!—and though I have unconsciously brought sorrow and misfortune upon you—though I am nobody and have nothing, I deserved your love. But that is all over now! God bless and protect you, and restore you to happiness and good fortune. Farewell, beloved Guy.

“‘MARIE DELVIGNE.’”

“She does not even sign herself by your name,” said Sir Frederic, clearing his throat by an audible hem. “Poor girl! This is not the letter of a designing woman.”

“Designing!” cried Neville, snatching the note from Sir Fred. “Did you ever hear or know of so distractedly foolish a creature? Why, any woman, with a grain of common sense, would have known that once married nothing save death or misconduct could break the tie; and though I might have used some unguarded

expressions in the confusion of the moment, she ought to have known me well enough to guess I should return in a different mood."

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Compton, "it's an awful business. I can imagine a high-spirited, warm-hearted girl rushing away anywhere, from the sense of being a burden to the man who had married her by mistake. But let us try to think calmly what is best to be done. It is a frightful idea—the poor girl wandering about, with probably little or no cash, and—"

"Good God!" interrupted Neville, dashing his hand upon the table. "It is intolerable!"

"What steps have you taken—or have you done anything?"

"On hearing Wheeler's tale," returned Neville, "I of course cross-examined her, and found, though Marie had told her she intended seeking her friends in London, she had taken a rail ticket only to Folkestone, and my impression was, that she took the steamboat, which left yesterday about two o'clock, and crossed to Bologne. I immediately proceeded to Folkestone, and endeavored to find some trace of her from the porters and people at the station, aided by Wheeler's description of her dress, but none of them had seen any person who at all answered to it. One man described a lady like Marie in age and height, but not in dress. Now I am quite sure about the dress, and this porter could

not remember whether she had gone on to London by the next train or not. I wasted several hours striving to gain some trace of the poor girl, and then hurried on here, intending to go to St. John's Wood; not that I have much hope she would return there, but their knowledge of her habits and acquaintances may help me. At any rate, I wish to make it known generally that she is my wife; and, hard up as I am, I will reward to the utmost in my power any one who will restore her to me. Poor, poor Marie! I fear I have wounded her deeply."

Neville stopped abruptly; the recollection of the agony in her large soft, loving eyes, raised so imploringly to him as he turned abruptly from her, rose up and nearly choked him.

"To St. John's Wood—to the lady in whose establishment she resided?" asked Sir Frederic. "You are right, whether it lead to anything or not. But your best, and indeed only plan, is to place the matter in the hands of the police."

After some further consultation, it was decided to go to Scotland Yard, and then to proceed to Miss Redoubt's.

As they drove towards St. John's Wood, Neville long preserved unbroken silence, and the gay, genial young Baronet, unspeakably mortified at so sad a conclusion of his bright schemes, felt too uncomfortable and uneasy to venture an observation.

"One of the most painful and humiliating results of this unhappy business," said Neville, breaking silence, "at least to myself, is to confess before a starched old schoolmistress that I have acted in so confoundedly unprincipled a manner; and then that other girl, the heiress, she will despise me, and, in short, I am in a very degrading position. But, by Heaven, I could stand anything except the idea of my poor Marie wandering about alone in her wretchedness, without a soul to give her counsel or to help her. Who could have dreamt of her flying in so decided a manner from a hasty word?"

"And why the deuce," cried Sir Fred, "did you not keep your temper, and say: 'Well, I've got a charming wife at any rate, and we must try and pull through,' and you would have pulled through. 'Gad! life isn't so poverty-stricken that there is but one way of being happy in it!'"

"Ah, Compton," returned his companion, "it is very easy to philosophize with well-lined pockets. You'd be of a different temper if you had nothing but debt and difficulty around and before you. However, let me only find poor Marie, and I too will think differently. Though where our food and raiment are to come from Heaven alone can tell."

"Ah! they'll come, never you fear," said Sir Fred cheerfully, "and here we are." To the cabman, "There, No. 22, left hand."

CHAPTER XII.

THE time consumed by ringing the bell and applying for admission seemed of fearful length to the agitated Neville; but at length they were introduced to the presence of Miss Redoubt, awful and portentous as she loomed in the dim twilight caused by a pair of hastily-lit composites.

"To what may I owe the honor of this visit?" she was beginning with deliberate dignity.

"Excuse my intrusion," broke in Neville. "I have called to ask for Miss Delvigne's address either in Paris or London; or, in short, if you have any idea what her plans were?"

"No," returned the astonished lady; "and allow *me* to ask how a gentleman of your position happens to need information respecting an obscure French teacher? Such inquiries don't look well!"—whereupon Neville and Sir Frederic between them avowed to the astonished Miss Redoubt the criminal proceedings of the last few days.

It was a mangled, even an ungrammatical exposition—the friends were far too agitated to study graces of diction; but at length the whole truth was conveyed to their horrified listener.

Her first thought was not unnaturally the ruined reputation of her establishment. She burst into a torrent of exclamations—

“What an unprincipled young woman!” she cried, gasping with rage, “divested of all feminine modesty and proper caution—regardless of justice to others, and the character of the establishment which sheltered her.”

“You’ll have the goodness to remember you are speaking to me of my wife,” said Neville sternly.

“I must say,” continued the infuriated schoolmistress, “that you are justly repaid for your unprincipled conduct; and the only reparation you can make to me for the injury your own and your wife’s conduct has inflicted upon me is to keep the matter perfectly quiet.”

“Certainly, madam,” returned Neville, “as quiet as is consistent with an earnest search for the unfortunate lady.”

“The unfortunate lady will probably find consolation,” sneered Miss Redoubt.

“Hush! madam!” said the young Baronet gravely. “However justly annoyed, you should respect the state of my friend’s mind.”

“I can only reflect on the serious injury he and his schemes have inflicted upon me. I would not, for worlds, that one of my pupils should know of the horrible depravity existing under the very same roof with them. Nothing would induce—”

Here her harangue was interrupted by the door suddenly opening to admit the young heiress, Miss Delvigne, who with cheeks paler even than usual, clasped hands, and a look of keen anxiety, came hastily into the room. Disregarding her *gouvernante*, she went straight to Neville and laid her hand upon his arm. "Where is she? what have you done with her?" she said. "I know there is something terribly wrong or you would not be here."

"So! Miss Delvigne," cried the confounded Miss Redoubt, "you seem marvellously well informed. What is the meaning of this?"

"Of course I know all about it," said the agitated girl, turning to her questioner, evidently too full of her subject to regard the wrath about to be poured upon her; "Marie always confided in me. I knew she was to be married privately to Captain Neville, because his family would oppose it, and I thought she would be so happy, and that he was so good!"

"Ah!" groaned Miss Redoubt, struck dumb at this unsatisfactory result of two years' careful training.

A most painful game of cross-questions and crooked answers ensued, which ground Neville into the very dust of humiliation, and in which the tact and determination of the heiress astonished Sir Frederic. At last she clasped his hand in the earnestness of entreaty.

"You will tell me truth," she said. "Oh! do tell me all;" and the Baronet, in as few as little offensive words, declared the whole, dwelling strongly on Neville's present love and despair; but Miss Delvigne, with a woman's quick, instinctive sympathy, divined it all.

"My poor Marie!" she exclaimed. "How could you wound her, Captain Neville? It was base and unmanly. You must have spoken cruelly."

"He was cruelly situated," put in Sir Frederic.

"And now," continued Miss Delvigne, "where is she? What can she be doing? Oh! find her, Sir Frederic. See, I have twenty pounds here"—pulling out her purse—"give it to somebody to get her back—do something."

"Observe," cried Miss Redoubt dramatically, "the pernicious effect of contamination. You forget my presence, Miss Delvigne—you put me aside."

"To think," continued the heiress, utterly disregarding her, "of her being alone, without a soul near to comfort her, and she loved you so much" (to Neville). "Oh! what shall we do? What shall we do?" and she burst into a passion of tears.

Neville stood like a statue, and Sir Frederic, thoroughly moved, exclaimed, "Pray calm yourself! We have put the matter into the hands of

the police, and, believe me, nothing that affection, perseverance, or money can do to discover her will be left undone."

"Can you tell me," asked Neville in a low tone, "had she any money?"

"Yes," sobbed Mary Delvigne, "I saw her put some in her purse on Monday night; she had ten sovereigns, ten shillings, and a three-penny-bit. She had been saving up."

"And," gasped the furious Miss Redoubt, "you knew all this and never revealed it to me."

"Of course I didn't," returned the heiress. "Who would? No one I know, except Miss Trotter, and she's a cross, ill-natured old thing, without any feeling."

Miss Redoubt, overcome, sank back upon a sofa.

"It would assist us materially," said Neville, "if you could give us some particulars concerning any friends or relations with whom she would be likely to take shelter."

Miss Delvigne shook her head.

"She was brought up by an old great-aunt—a severe, stingy old woman, who expected Marie never to cost her anything; and she has a cousin, Pierre something, in some *bureau* in Paris—I forget the name;—and her only friends here are a Madame Lacordeille and her husband—half American, half French people. I do not

know where she would be likely to go ; not to her aunt, certainly."

"But what is the aunt's name and address?"

"Madame Rouvigac, but I do not know her address."

"I am sure Miss Redoubt will not refuse what information she can give," said the Baronet insinuatingly ; at which appeal the incensed lady, after much abuse and solemn renunciation of the culprits, gave the name of the street, but could not remember the number.

CHAPTER XIII.

“GOOD-EVENING, gentlemen.” The speaker was a middle-sized, middle-aged man, plump, fair, somewhat simple in aspect, with light hair, a fresh clean look, and very small, bright, restless eyes, of no particular color. He was neatly dressed, and might be, from his general appearance, a prosperous clerk in some professional or mercantile house. The scene was the oft-mentioned room at Morley’s. Neville and Sir Frederic Compton were sitting at a table, on which were strewn writing-materials, papers, etc., and an eager expression dwelt on the countenance of each.

“Good-evening,” said Neville, turning in his chair, and taking upon himself the reply to this general salutation.

It was the day but one after their visit to Miss Redoubt. The interval had passed in feverish anticipation on the part of Neville, who, the more the difficulties of the search increased, seemed to see more vividly the disinterested simplicity of his wife, and long more ardently to recover his lost treasure, as he now felt her to be. He had written a long explanatory letter

to her, to the address given him by Miss Redoubt, and impatiently awaited the result, although of the same opinion as Miss Delvigne, that his lost bride would cling to London.

And now he was at Morley's by appointment, to receive the report of that well-known and highly intelligent officer, Mr. Pim. That functionary laid aside his hat, and approaching the table added its encumbrances a small bundle of papers, folded long and evenly, and tied with black tape.

"Well," cried the impetuous young Baronet, "any trace yet?"

"Why, yes," said the detective, slowly wiping his brow, "I think we've got a faint scent of her."

"But even that," said Neville eagerly, "will be enough for a man so skilful, so practised as yourself."

"I hope so, sir; but sometimes the keenest men are baffled by some simple accident. However, after a deal of examinations and talk at Folkestone, though I could find out very little, I felt a sort of an idea I ought to try at London Bridge, and I always follow up such like ideas. I had, mind you, come to the conclusion the lady had changed trains at Folkestone, but I could not hear of any one like her in dress or appearance, as you've described her"—nodding to Neville and Sir Frederic—"but one porter, a bright sort of fellow, as I didn't see at first, he

noticed that a lady had stopped there by an afternoon train from Dover, with an uncommon soft, foreign sort of a voice, and, to the best of his belief, she went on in the tidal train, at 12.20."

"Ha!" ejaculated Neville, "go on."

"Well, gentlemen, I'll not detain you to tell of all the people I examined and talked to—ay, and treated—at that big place, nor all the cabmen I spoke to. It was very like looking for a needle in a bundle of straw; but at last I lit on a fellow—No. two, four, six, ought—as had took up a lady answering to your description, in black—all in black, mind you—from the 4.40 express, on Wednesday, but he was rather the worse of liquor, so that I didn't get much out of him then, and I couldn't see him nowhere yesterday; but this morning I did see him, and he says he drove her straight to 'Waterloo,' and she had just one box and a little bag. They arrived in good time for the Portsmouth train, and she paid him two shillings without a word; a porter took her box, and he saw no more of her. Now, I cannot gather another blessed scrap about her. I have lounged and talked and strove, but not a glimpse can I catch. The porters has no recollection of any one. It's very different in a bit of a place like Folkestone, and such a rush and bustle as at 'Waterloo.' The cab-driver had no recollection of the porter as took her box. He was paid and

went away at once, but I promised him a reward if he would give us any help."

"Right," said Neville, who began to pace the room. "What could induce her to go to Portsmouth (if she went there)? What connections has she in that direction? She might go by Southampton to France, to join her old aunt, in Paris."

"Do you feel any conviction that this lady in black *was* Mrs. Neville?" asked Sir Frederic.

"I fancy it was her, but I couldn't be sure. You see no one saw her face much. It was the height and the voice, and a something they all remarked. But I have lost time before, by being thrown on a wrong scent. You had better put an advertisement in the *Times*; you know best how to word it."

"I thought you had done so," exclaimed Sir Frederic.

"Yes, sir, we did so at once, but no result; and I think it was not sufficiently particular worded. Now, if this gent"—nodding at Neville—"would compose it himself—"

Here the door was opened by the inflexible Simmons, who said, "If you please, sir, a young lady wishes to see you."

"A young lady!" exclaimed Sir Frederic, to whom he addressed himself. "What sort of a young lady?"

Neville, turning a shade paler than before

paused in his walk, his heart standing still with a sudden hope.

Before Simmons could reply, a slight, girlish figure entered, and the young lady said simply, "It's only me, Sir Frederic."

They recognized, to their astonishment, Miss Delvigne.

"I have got some intelligence—only a little—just now, and I came off at once, hoping it might help you," she continued, without greeting or pause, and untying her bonnet-strings hastily.

She was as pale as ever, but her large, black eyes blazed with excitement, and though nervous in manner, it was evidently not in the least from finding herself the only lady among three men.

"Pray sit down," said Sir Frederic, coloring like a girl, and placing a chair by the table.

She held out her hand to Neville kindly but silently, and then, addressing Sir Frederic, who was looking involuntarily towards the door, as though expecting some one, said—

"No; there is no one with me; I stole away alone, I was so anxious to know something—to see you both. But I must tell you at once! This morning, returning from our walk, I stopped to give a trifle to poor Marie's old Irish apple-woman that sits at the corner near our school. You know it?" Neville nodded. "And she began to talk of Marie, and ask when she

would come back. I was surprised, and said I didn't know, and she went on and said her little grandson saw her some days ago at the station. I asked her what station. 'Waterloo,' she said. Her little grandson sold newspapers and things there, and I asked where he was to be found, and she said he went to a ragged-school all day, but took the evening papers to Waterloo Station. His name is Dennis Rooney, and his father lives in—oh, such a queer name; I have it written down;" and she read—"Cross Court, Lamb's Alley, in the Borough.' They used to live in St. John's Wood, and the boy was often with his grandmother, so he came to know Marie—poor dear Marie!"

"Really, this is a great discovery!" said the sanguine Baronet.

"God bless you," cried Neville, "then you must be right in your conjecture"—(to the detective)—"that the lady in black you traced from London Bridge to the Waterloo Station was Mrs. Neville."

"It looks like it," returned that individual, deliberately, unmoved by the feverish gleam of hope which animated the others. "The young lady was uncommon sharp, to come off straight. If we find your lady, sir, she'll have done the best of the business. I must see this boy at once, and I'm thinking the best place to catch him will be at the station itself. You say,

miss, he attends every evening with the papers?"

Miss Delvigne assented.

"Could you describe him, miss?"

"A little, starved-looking boy," she returned promptly; "something like a spaniel that expects a beating, with a pile of rough red hair like a bush, and a queer voice; there's nothing else like it. I never could help laughing when he used to ask us for pennies."

"Oh! I'll find him."

"Shall I accompany you?" asked Neville eagerly.

"Lord bless yer heart! no, sir," returned the detective, with uncompromising rejection; "leave it to me!"

"But you will return and let me know what success, to-night?"

"Well, if I'm not too late; or, you know, I may have to go on to Southampton—may be France."

All this time Miss Delvigne sat listening, her elbows on the table, her hands supporting her head, her bonnet pushed back, her luxuriant black hair loose and straying in wavy locks amongst her thin white fingers, all shyness and reserve vanished, absorbed in one paramount idea—her lost friend.

Sir Frederic stole an admiring glance at her earnest face, lit up into beauty by her unselfish

purpose. "What a brick of a girl," he thought; "who could have expected so much fire under that cold exterior?"

"Promise him a reward from me," she said to the officer, emphatically; "and remember, he only knows me as 'the other young lady.' Ah! if we could only find her!" and the tears began to roll down her face.

"Now, then, sir," said Mr. Pim, "if you will settle about that advertisement, I'll be off and snatch a bit of dinner before I go to the station, for we must keep a sharp look-out there."

"Probably," said Neville, "Miss Delvigne will help us here? She can suggest some especial wording which will catch poor Marie's attention, and—"

"Have you not advertised yet?" she interrupted, in rather indignant tones.

"Yes," returned Neville mournfully, "but to no avail."

Miss Delvigne clasped her hands with a despairing gesture.

"You will try again?" she said.

"Certainly."

"Then advertise in French."

Mr. Pim nodded approvingly.

"Not a bad notion," he said.

"Put 'to Marie from Marie,'" continued the young heiress, "and go on—Oh! give me some

paper and I'll write it. I suppose none of you can write French?"

"Not very grammatically, I fear," returned Sir Frederic.

"Well, shall I put it as if from myself? She'll be more likely to mind me, you know" (to Neville), "because she *knows* I love her."

Neville winced almost visibly under this unconscious rebuke.

"Will this do?" said Miss Delvigne, after writing rapidly for a few minutes. "'To M'amie Marie from Marie. I have good news for thee, my friend! Come or send. Do not cause any more to grieve the heart that has loved you since the 3d of June, 1851. Write to M. D.' Where shall I give the address?"

"To my lodgings, No. 5 Cecil Street," said Neville.

"You see I always called her M'amie, and the 3d of June was the day I first went to school, and was crying like to break my heart, and she was so kind! Ah! who is there to dry her tears now?" and the warm-hearted girl burst into sobs.

"Oh, never mind me," she gasped, seeing the dismay on her companions' faces; "I put it in because she'll know at once who writes."

"Well, I'll be off then," said the officer, "and have this inserted to-morrow morning, both in the London and Paris papers."

Meantime Sir Frederic had offered Miss Delvigne a glass of water, and while she drank it, bent over to comfort her with a few hopeful, sympathetic words, when the door once more opened, this time to admit Mr. Foster himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. FOSTER looked fresh as ever—presenting his usual well-dressed, well-washed, well-cared-for appearance. Nevertheless, it did not so much convey the idea of green old age, as of some patent preserving process, whereby a certain outer seeming is obtained by drying up the sentient juices, which, while they soften and mellow man's nature, tend to exhaustion and decay.

He paused on the threshold, silent with astonishment at the group opposite to him.

"Well, sir," said Sir Frederic, taking the initiative, and advancing with his bright, frank smile to meet the old gentleman, "you find us in conclave, and Miss Delvigne has most kindly and promptly brought us some very important information, which will, I hope, lead to the recovery of her friend, poor Mrs. Neville."

"Oh, indeed!" returned the old gentleman, with his polite, indifferent simper, which meant nothing, and hid everything.

"Hope you'll succeed, sir," to Neville, as if his pocket had been picked, and he was hunting

the thief. "Curious case, very! The bridegroom sometimes absconds, ha! ha! the bride rarely. Well, my dear ward, and what are you doing here by yourself? What romantic scheme have you got in your little heart or head? But we must take care—we must take care and not run about alone like an errant demoiselle. What's Miss Redoubt doing to let you wander away?"

He always addressed his ward in that peculiar soothing tone, considered by some elderly men as especially acceptable to young ladies and lunatics.

It always irritated, yet lowered her in her own esteem, and reduced her to that condition of shy reserve, from which only a deep motive, a strong excitement, could rouse her native, moral courage, of which she possessed a large share, united to a silent contempt for conventionalities, the result of her rather exceptional education. She now changed color, and said, in an embarrassed tone, totally dissimilar from the collected manner in which she had discussed the measures for Marie's recovery.

"It is not Miss Redoubt's fault, sir; I went to my room after dinner, while she was hearing a German class—put on my things, and walked out—no one saw me, and I did not think of anything but how to get to Captain Neville, and tell him what I had heard—and, oh! Mr. Foster,

Sir Frederic thinks we shall find her;" and she brightened up again.

"Well, my dear, you seem very enthusiastic about your friend; very amiable trait in youthful character, eh! Sir Frederic! but we'll see, we'll see. It's a nice match for a lady in your friend's position—she'll turn up, no doubt."

"It has been a great misfortune to her," said Miss Delvigne in a low voice; "but I do hope it will end well yet."

Neville, who, under his peculiar circumstances, felt the presence of any stranger an intolerable insult, here took up his hat.

"I shall go with Mr. Pim," he said to Sir Frederick, "to suggest one or two points on the way. You'll find me afterwards at my rooms."

For Neville, eager in his new economy, had declined his old expensive quarters at Morley's and had taken a diminutive lodging in one of the small streets leading out of the Strand.

"Good-morning, Miss Delvigne; I feel we shall owe our success to you, if we succeed; and we *must succeed*."

He shook hands with Miss Delvigne, warmly, bowed to Mr. Foster, and left the room, followed by the innocent-looking detective.

"Poor fellow!" said Sir Frederic, looking after him; "he is much cut up, and has suffered severely. Yet," he continued, "had this poor girl not shown the reality of her story by the

desperate step she has taken, Neville might not have thoroughly believed her innocent of intentional deception."

"I hate suspicious people," said the heiress.

"Well, well, it is a curious case—a very curious case—and it must take a large amount of faith to believe that—that in short the French teacher did nothing to forward a delusion which was so largely to her benefit."

"Benefit!" cried Miss Delvigne, warming up. "Misfortune, you mean, sir! to be tied to a husband that don't want you—why, it's enough to drive one mad!" and a flush of indignation swept across her brow.

"Don't excite yourself, my dear," returned Mr. Foster, with an amiable smile. "The mistake was, I shall ever consider, a very lucky thing, by Gad! very lucky, eh! Sir Frederic?" with a knowing look.

At which Miss Delvigne blushed and paled, with painful rapidity.

"Far from it, sir," returned the young Baronet, gravely; "the whole thing was a misfortune from beginning to end."

"You meant well, at any rate," began Miss Delvigne, impulsively, when the recollection of her curious position respecting Compton rushed upon and silenced her.

"Have you seen Neville's brother to-day?" asked Sir Frederic of his grandfather.

"Yes, I have."

"And what did he say?"

"He thinks it was a conspiracy to entrap Neville. Ha, ha!" simpered Mr. Foster. "He has his crotchets, but he is a shrewd man—first-rate business abilities—a man of the highest honor."

"If Neville finds his wife, he'll do yet," said Sir Frederic. "If not, he'll go to the bad."

"I want to go back," said Miss Delvigne, suddenly and sadly, depressed by the glimpse of icy realities this short conversation had given her.

"Well, and you shall," cried her guardian indulgently; "I will escort you myself."

"Thank you; and Mr. Foster, don't let Miss Redoubt scold me—I can't bear it to-day—I—" and she was obliged to hide her eyes in her handkerchief.

"Come away then—don't cry, my dear—don't cry."

Sir Frederic offered his arm, and led her down stairs.

"Don't despond!" he whispered, almost tenderly, and pressing her hand as he placed her in Mr. Foster's brougham—"we'll find her, and you and I will dine with Neville and his wife in their own house before long. I'll write you word how we get on. Do let me think of you as cheering up."

Oh! what a look flashed back into the young Baronet's eyes—hope, gratitude, and reliance on him.

"Thank you—how good you are!" she murmured, as he drew back to admit his grandfather.

And old Foster drew up the window with an irrepressible chuckle of satisfaction.

It was early morning at Saratoga Lodge, some three or four days after the close of the last chapter, that is, the house-bell had not ceased to vibrate under the hasty applications of butchers, bakers, and green-grocers. Mrs. Coleman, in a morning dress, was deep in account-books and bills in her own *sanctum*, and Miss Coleman and Miss Eveline Coleman, after the usual fashion of genteel English families, were employed in music and embroidery, neither of which accomplishments would, in all probability, occupy a moment of their after-life, while from all household management, their natural and inevitable business, they carefully abstained.

It was a warm, glowing June morning, the breeze that stirred the muslin curtains was warm—the perfume of mignonette came pleasantly from the boxes on the window-ledge, and the usual summer sounds of London—genteel London—viz.: a German band, playing not so badly for a street band, and the cry of "all a-growing, all a-blowing," from itinerant florists, fell sooth-

ingly on the ear. The eldest Miss Coleman had desisted from a difficult passage of Thalberg's, and Miss Eveline stitched on, absorbed in the beauties of a green *chenille* leaf.

"I cannot practise any longer, it is so warm," exclaimed Miss Coleman, a young lady who had already been out one season, and gathered large experience.

"Don't talk, Lizzy, till I count this," returned the younger.

"What are *you* doing with yourself?" resumed Miss Coleman, to some invisible person, as she came forward and raised the lace *portières* which fell across a doorway leading into an inner drawing-room. "Why, you are pacing up and down like a caged lion. You will exhaust yourself, my dear Miss Delvigne."

It was the heiress, who, from her constant differences with Miss Redoubt on the subject of her friend's delinquency, found her sojourn in that lady's renowned establishment not a little uncomfortable, and with Mr. Foster's fullest approbation, gladly accepted Mrs. Coleman's invitation to spend a few weeks with her "dear girls."

"Oh, no! it would exhaust me a great deal more to sit quiet when I feel so uneasy."

"If you were to take a difficult piece to practise, or an interesting book to read, it would relieve your mind; you are highly nervous, Miss Delvigne."

"Why, do you think I could rest and be contented when that poor, dear, foolish thing is in the greatest trouble, perhaps in want, Miss Coleman? Think of that."

"Well, you know it was all her own fault! It was very shocking of her to run off with Captain Neville at first, and worse again leaving him when she was his wife. Mamma, I assure you, is quite uneasy at your feeling so much sympathy with Miss —, Mrs. Neville (I scarcely know what to call her), and cannot bear the subject to be mentioned. Indeed, your friend is scarcely fit for us to talk about."

"Not fit for you to talk about!" cried Miss Delvigne, the indignant blood mounting to her cheek. "Marie! the kindest, the truest! I tell you, Miss Coleman, you'd have run off with Captain Neville yourself if he had asked you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the young lady, while she colored with indignation; "you are very excitable, my dear."

"Sir Frederic Compton—Mr. Foster," announced a footman, and the gentlemen entered the field of action.

There was an indescribable though unexpressed antagonism between Miss Delvigne and her guardian; a sort of dim consciousness on her side of being ever at a disadvantage. Now, as usual, she felt in some odd way awkward and ashamed of herself as he entered.

"Good-morning, young ladies! Good-morning! Fresh and charming, I see, as ever. Brought my grandson to pay his respects to you, and to give some tidings of her missing friend to my enthusiastic little ward. Eh! Mary, my dear. Youthful warmth, very pleasing to witness. Pretty well to-day, my love?"

"Yes, Mr. Foster," returned his ward, dryly.

Meantime Sir Frederic had only greeted her with a profoundly respectful bow; and opened a running fire of criticism on Miss Eveline Coleman's industry.

"They put butterflies and birds, and all sorts of things among flowers. Why don't you try the caterpillar, Miss Coleman? There's the *chenille* all ready. Give him a couple of bead eyes, and the thing is complete. Or a bee—a busy bee!"

"And my good friend Mrs. Coleman," asked Mr. Foster, glancing rather uncomfortably at this grouping of the party. "I should be glad of a word of advice from her excellent judgment. Might I venture to ask for a private interview? Ah—I—"

"Certainly, Mr. Foster," said the eldest and experienced Miss Coleman, rising. "Mamma is generally occupied till about this time in the morning, but I am sure she is free now;" and she left the room.

"I must see you again, my little dove," said the polite old gentleman to Miss Delvigne,

"after I have spoken to your kind hostess. I must arrange about a residence for you. It shan't go back to Miss Redoubt's if it don't like!"

"I certainly shall not," returned his ward, with sudden decision, though in a low tone.

"Hey! My fair ward is determined, is she? Well, well; we'll see"—taking her hand and patting it—"you can do what you like with your old guardian. He is soft—too soft—by half."

"Mamma will be delighted to see you, Mr. Foster," said Miss Coleman, re-entering. "She is in her own room. I will take you to her. Eveline, you are to go to the study and copy this for mamma"—holding out a paper.

The young lady rose at once, took it, and left by a door at the farther end of the room.

"I must see you again, my dear, wait for me. Fred, my boy, leave you in good company, eh?"

As the door closed Miss Delvigne rose from her seat, and approaching the young Baronet, without a shadow of embarrassment, exclaimed,

"What news have you for me? Why did you not write again?"

"Because, unfortunately, I had no good news to communicate; then, I wanted to see you myself, and tell you what we have been doing. The boy you described has been found; but that is all. It took a great deal of trouble to discover him, and then nothing could extract a

syllable of information from him. It was impossible to convince him that the police could mean well to Miss—I mean Mrs. Neville—or to any one. A detective and the gallows seem synonymous terms in the apprehension of the interesting race to which he belongs; and he has fairly baffled every one. The extraordinary amount of unnecessary lies and fabulous circumstantial histories he has told would supply a railway library. The detective thinks he must be heavily bribed to confuse every one, and throw us off the right scent; but I believe it is only a native instinct to bamboozle the police."

"I knew you would never manage him," said the heiress, thoughtfully. "I tell you, Sir Frederic, no one will ever get anything out of him but myself. He would trust me. Can I not see him? I might go to your hotel or the police office, or, better than all, to poor Dennis's own home, if you will come with me."

"You *are* a trump!" exclaimed Compton, with more earnestness than elegance, "and I believe you are right. I will speak to Mr. Foster about it. I daresay he will consent, and I might bring the boy here."

"No, no; not here," cried Mary Delvigne, coloring. "They laugh at me, and they despise my poor, dear Marie; they say she is not fit to be spoken of! What do you think of *that*, Sir Frederic? Do you believe that a girl who trusts

to her own true lover—as Captain Neville *appeared* to be—and doesn't deceive a father or mother—mind, I couldn't bear *that*—is so bad and so shocking, eh, Sir Frederic?"

"Certainly not," cried the profound judge; "I know it is what old people call imprudent, and wrong, and all that sort of thing; but I also know that, if I could ever hope a woman I loved would so far do wrong for me, the profoundest reverence and tenderness, and—" The young Baronet hesitated and colored at his own impetuosity—"would never suffice in my estimation to prove my gratitude."

"Well, I believe you have a good heart," said his companion, with a grave simplicity, that at once charmed and mortified him; "still, if everything had been clear and open, all this misery would not have happened, and I suspect you were at the bottom of the mischief."

"I am afraid I was," said Compton, candidly. "God knows with what good intentions, and to a certain degree successfully; for Neville, whatever he may have said in the horror of discovering that—"

He paused, remembering suddenly the awkwardness of the subject.

"She hadn't any money," said the heiress, coolly, completing his sentence. "Go on."

"Well, whatever he may have said in the agony of the disappointment, Neville was most

passionately in love—in love, I believe, for the first time in his life. And had she the rank of an empress, and the wealth of an empire, I do not think he would have sought her if he was not. Certainly money was of importance to him; it is, more or less, to every one; that is—I mean—”

And again the unfortunate Baronet felt stranded.

“You are right—I daresay you are right,” said the young heiress, thoughtfully. “Money is very necessary to some—to men especially; and I most heartily wish I could give all mine to Marie and Captain Neville. Have I much, Sir Frederic? How much? I suppose you know all about it.”

“I wish to God you hadn’t a *sous*! You’ve a great deal too much, Miss Delvigne!”

And Sir Frederic started from his seat, and walked abruptly to the other end of the room.

The heiress looked after him, much surprised, colored vividly, smiled, and composing herself, laughed outright.

“Thank you,” she said; “I believe it is a good wish. But to the point. Will you manage that I shall see Dennis? I must see him.”

“Ask my grandfather yourself,” said Sir Frederic, gloomily; “he can refuse you nothing.”

“Now, you know that is all nonsense,” returned Miss Delvigne. “Besides, I hate to ask

him anything. I don't like—" She paused. "I know I am rude; pray forgive me, but I don't like him well enough, and he thinks me a fool."

"How do you know?" asked Sir Frederic, laughing, and picking up a small charm in the shape of a heart, formed of malachite and gold, which, in nervously playing with, Miss Delvigne had detached from her chain.

She held out her hand.

"No; you have been so rude and severe to me to-day, you must give me this as atonement."

"Rude to you?" she cried. "How? I did not know—I never intended—you are very good. Ah! Sir Frederic, give it to me."

"Well, another time. Let me keep it now? On my soul, Miss Delvigne, if you knew how miserable I feel about this business of Neville's, and—and something else, you would not refuse me any little crumb of comfort!"

Miss Delvigne was silent for a moment, then abruptly asked—

"How is Captain Neville?"

"Oh! he is really to be pitied; he was in such despair when we could extract nothing from the boy that he insisted the only way to get a clue was through her French relations."

The heiress shook her head.

"So I think," replied Sir Frederic to that mute expression of opinion.

"She is in London—I feel she is," said Miss Delvigne.

"So do I, somehow."

Here Mr. Foster re-entered, rather fussily, leading in Mrs. Coleman.

"Must be off now, my dear ward. Hope my grandson has done his best to atone for my absence? Ha, ha, ha! Mrs. Coleman most kindly and considerately and hospitably has invited you to pass a month under her agreeable roof. Eh? I think I must leave you now."

"One moment, sir," said his grandson; "Miss Delvigne is terribly cut up at the failure of our attempts to extract any trace of poor Neville's wife from that boy. She is of opinion that she could get the truth from him, and is anxious, with your permission, and in your presence, to examine him herself."

"Do, dear Mr. Foster," exclaimed Mary, warmed out of her general coldness towards her guardian by her extreme anxiety; "do let me see this poor, ignorant boy; he will trust me!"

"Who would not trust you, my dear young lady," said the polite old gentleman. "Well, we'll see about it—we'll see about it."

Mrs. Coleman assumed an air of being deaf, and dumb, and blind, during the prosecution of so improper a topic.

Again Mary and Sir Frederic urged the impracticable Mr. Foster, who, with "nods and

becks, and wreathed smiles," would only pat his ward's cheek and repeat, "We'll see, we'll see;" then kissing her brow, took an elaborate leave of Mrs. Coleman and left the room.

Sir Frederic held Mary's hand for an unnecessary moment, with a lingering pressure, and whispered—

"Trust me, I will manage it."

CHAPTER XV.

BAFFLED, fevered, mortified, yet still, over and above all other feelings, absorbed in his search for Marie, Neville dared not relinquish the hope of finding her. It seemed the only chance for him to keep from brain fever; besides, like a true Saxon, there was a strong vein of common sense in his character, and he argued that in the long run detectives were rarely baffled.

The thought of the critical time which was slipping by sometimes made his brain reel with images of horror. The idea of Marie, bright and gentle, so pure and so inexperienced, buffeted by the roughness of common life, without a friend or protector within reach, without money (for to Neville's experience five or six pounds was scarce two days' provision), alone in the world, thrilled him with positive pain.

Then her tender grace and beauty would rise up before him with redoubled attraction, till he gnashed his teeth in agony at the probability that others, besides himself, might feel its power just as keenly.

And this bright, warm-hearted, high-minded

creature, whose native nobility, like that of the thoroughbred courser's, deceived you by its trusting docility into forgetfulness of its latent power, he had tortured, crushed, and flung away, because she had only youth and loveliness, and truth and affection, and bright intelligence, but no *£ s. d.*

Bah! how he loathed himself! All things would be easy to him could he but find Marie, reinstate himself in her good opinion, and exercise the divine right, once more to clasp her in his arms, and proclaim in the face of the world that she was his own!

But Neville showed very little of all this—his haggard face and fevered eye, the rare exclamations forced from him by the intensity of his inward sufferings, alone bespoke them.

His brother, partially coming out of the iron indifference he had maintained since the crowning error of his sinning relative, had sent for Neville; and though in Guy's present state of humiliation there was probably the best chance of the brothers managing an amicable interview, it had ended in instilling a double allowance of embittered prejudice into the minds of both.

Neville gave but a short sketch of it to his friend, Sir Frederic.

"'Gad, sir!" he said to the latter, "he thinks he can trample honor, and feeling, and every attribute of a gentleman, under his feet, because

his pockets are well lined. He spoke in that cool, collected, distracting manner of his, as though he had deliberately weighed every syllable he was saying beforehand, which makes it a deuced deal more insulting. I will not attempt to repeat his words, but they were of a character towards one dearer to me than life itself, for whom I am a thousand times more jealous, because I have placed her in so equivocal a position; by Jove! had he not been my father's son, I should have horsewhipped him within an inch of his life. By Heaven, I doubt if we can have a drop of the same blood in our veins!"

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"DEAR SIR FREDERIC,

"I have not seen you, or Mr. Foster, or heard from either of you for three days. What are you doing? and when am I to see Dennis? I know you will never get anything out of him without me. It is nearly ten days since my poor, dear Marie disappeared, and nothing done yet. What worthless detectives! I could have done better myself. I entreat you to take me to Dennis, or bring Dennis to me. What cruelty to keep a girl in slavery till she is twenty-one! Do make your grandfather agree to my seeing him somewhere—not here.

"Yours sincerely,

"MARY DELVIGNE."

"MY DEAR MISS DELVIGNE,

"We lost all traces of Dennis for two days—but they have him now. My grandfather will call for you to-morrow at eleven.

"We are to meet at Neville's lodgings. Do not accuse me of being a laggard! I have every motive to urge on that can actuate a man, and among them your wishes are all potent.

"Yours most faithfully,

"FREDERIC COMPTON."

Sir Frederic and Neville were waiting at the latter's lodgings for nearly half an hour before Mr. Pim made his appearance. He entered the room with a less placid countenance than usual, bearing a slightly mortified and peevish expression.

He dragged after him the boy Dennis—a shade dirtier even than ordinary—with his face screwed into a whimsical look of despair, suffering, and injured innocence.

"You'll excuse me, gentlemen," he said apologetically, "bringing this warmint into your society—but if I take my eye from him one moment he's off—and it's precious hard to catch him again. Stand in that corner, you young rascal! and don't stir till I give you leave! It's my belief, sir" (to Neville), "that he knows a deal more than you think; but he's such a blockhead, he won't understand that the best thing for all parties is to make a clean breast."

"Ah, good gentlemen!" whined Dennis, with an indescribable mixture of London twang and Irish brogue, "sure, I'm a poor orphant! why do yer let him be always a torturin' o' me? I've no peace night nor day—and I've lost mee character at the station thro' having the likes of him inquirin' after me! There isn't a respectable boy 'ull give me browns for a sixpence—oo—oo!" a burst of sobs, and a general smearing of his face with the cuff of his sleeve.

"But, my man," said Neville, kindly, "it would be better for you to tell the truth about this lady, and get a reward, that to howl in that fashion."

"Lady! why then—look here now—sure, the divil a lady, good nor bad, I seen. It's an invention of his," jerking his thumb towards Mr. Pim, "to chate yez."

"He's the most desperate young liar I ever came across," ejaculated that individual. "There is no use your beating about the bush. You know you acknowledged to seeing the lady we want."

"If I did, it was to save being worried to death by yez! Didn't I tell yez she took a first-class ticket for Hampton Court, and that wouldn't satisfy yer?"

"You rascal! you know you said it was a second-class to Worthing."

"Well—be Gorra—it was a third-class to Ports-

mouth! Will that please ye! Oh, murder! let me out of this!" and, suddenly diving under the detective's elbow, he made a rush to the door, which opened at that moment to admit Mr. Foster, who received the very unwelcome fugitive in his precise arms.

The old gentleman was speechless with indignation, and the detective, Neville, and Sir Frederic, eagerly captured and removed the aggressor, who was secured in a remote corner of the room, while Mr. Foster entered, conducting his ward.

She held out her hand to Sir Frederic and Neville with friendly cordiality, while Mr. Foster exclaimed—

"You see, my dear ward, what curious encounters your amiable enthusiasm hurries you into. Faugh! my dear sir" (to Neville), "could your man oblige me with a clothes-brush?"

Miss Delvigne meantime disregarding the chair drawn forward for her by Neville, advanced to the imprisoned *gamin*, and accosted him, smilingly—

"Don't you know me, Dennis?"

"Oh! then Glory be to God! Is it y'rself, miss, jewel? Sure I'm safe now. Ah, then it's meeself that's been tortured an' badgered! but divil the word of truth ever they got out of me!"

This last sentence was uttered with a proud consciousness of merit.

"Well, but you will tell *me* truth now, Dennis, will you not?"

"A', then, what do you want me to tell?"

"Listen to me. You know what friends that tall lady—who was so kind to you—was with me; you know we were always beside each other; but you did not know how I have cried and grieved not to be able to find her, fearing, Dennis, that she may have no money or friends, or anything."

"Och, murther! ye don't say so?"

"Yes, I do; and I must find her; and this gentleman here—her husband—is breaking his heart about her."

"Musha, then," returned Dennis, with another burst of tears, "I dunno which of yez to believe; but, sure, I done it for the best. Ah, miss, honey! I'll believe *you*, at any rate. Look here, now, I did see the lady about a fortnight ago, and she was all in black, and looked very white and tired-like; an' I offered her a *Daily Tili-graph*, just to see if she'd spake to me; but she never tuk no heed. So when this gent"—nodding to the detective—"kep' bothering about a lady in blue-and-white, with posies in her bonnet, I said truth when I said I never see no such lady."

"Nevertheless, you knew what he meant," said Miss Delvigne, gravely.

"Maybe I did, and maybe I didn't," returned

Dennis, while the rest gathered round in deep attention.

"Go on," said Mary.

"Well, you see, I had just gone round to get a few coppers of change to the arrival platform, and there was rather a scrimmage,—for the Portsmouth Express was just in—and first I heard her voice, which I knew as well as I knows granny's, say, 'Thank you,' to a bit of a country-looking lad what was putting down her box."

"Then," said Neville, in an agitated tone, "it was not on the *departure* platform you recognized her?"

"No, sir; I never see her, except at t'other side in the station; and then I thought it a rum go her not having a railway porter to carry her box. I was just going fur to offer to call a cab, when she hailed one herself; and then I had to run back to an old gent as was bawling for his change."

This statement was evidently true, for Dennis never varied from it; nor had he more to tell, save that he thought, but was not sure, that the cab hailed by Mrs. Neville had a gray horse, and a "fat ould driver."

It was now more than a fortnight since the missing lady had been detected by the lynx eyes of Dennis, which added in no small degree to the difficulties of the search. Still Mr. Pim was again quietly sanguine.

"You see, sir," he said to Neville, who, in this re-awakening of hope, could scarce steady his voice to speak, "you see, sir, we have ascertained two points beyond a doubt—first, that the lady's dress was different from what she wore at Dover; secondly, that she was at the Waterloo Station about six on the evening of Wednesday the 25th. Now to find the cab-driver! It's evident that, after arriving at the departure side of the station, she got some one to carry her luggage round to the other—and a clever dodge it was, too; it was a clear head to think of that. Any one searching for her would conclude that she had started by some of the down trains. I must lose no time in trying to find the cab and driver, for our future proceedings depend very much on this."

He took up his hat, bowing to the rest of the company, when Neville stopped him.

"For the future," he said resolutely, "we hunt in couples. It is impossible to say how soon you may discover Mrs. Neville, and under false impressions, without your possessing proper authority, she might be hurried into some rash step towards greater concealment, which might—. In short, I am with you."

"And," cried Miss Delvigne, "hadn't you better take Dennistoo? He might point out the cab, or help you in many ways."

"Bless your heart, miss!" said the detective,

admiringly. "It is not a bad notion; especially as the young warmint has made a clean breast of it at last."

"There, Dennis," continued Miss Delvigne, placing a very acceptable "something" in his hands; "do your best, be a good boy, and I will give you more."

"Arrah, then! My eye! sure, yez are a rale lady, and I'll find t'other un fur yez if she's above ground. The Lord 'ull reward yer honor."

"I really believe we have some clue at last," exclaimed Neville, his voice almost tremulous with hope.

CHAPTER XVI.

NEVILLE and his faithful guide reached the Waterloo Station during an opportune lull, when a Southampton train was expected, and the cabs had gathered thick at the arrival platform; but after a careful examination of the various physiognomies of their drivers, Dennis shook his head despondingly.

"There's none on 'em him," he said; "I couldn't just describe him, 'cos I seen him only a minit—but I'd know him—I'm sure I'd know him—and it's a S. W. cab. I seen the letters on the back on it jist as it was a-drivin' off—and so we'll find him here some hour in the day—'cos this is his rightful stan'—sure now I understan' yez, if ye lave it to me, I'm always about the Station, and if I can't catch him, may I never sell a 'Tiligraph.'"

"If you had only trusted us and understood us before," said Neville, sternly, "what valuable time might have been saved. Your obstinacy may be the cause of our total failure, boy."

"Faith! I'll make up for it, sir," returned the unabashed Bedouin. "An' as to thrustin', who'd thrust the police, 'cept a born-natural. Sure I

thought I was doing the lady a good turn, but never mind, I'll get the cabby for yez."

With this very indefinite assurance, Neville was fain to be content, and returned to his gloomy solitude, to pore over disheartening papers, and weary his brain with unaccustomed calculations; striving to have some plan of future exertion and livelihood fixed before his cherished hope—the recovery of his wife—was fulfilled.

In truth it was a perplexing problem—a couple of thousands for a capital—and the world before him, with no business-training or habits, to what could he turn himself? Yet he knew that he possessed a certain amount of method and capability for organization, with a consciousness that although neither of a quick nor brilliant class of intelligence, he had the power of steady and prolonged application.

Some military appointment he knew would be the best solution of his enigma, but he shrank from the publicity of application; his story was already widely circulated in all military circles, and he quivered at the idea of the pale witticisms, the contemptuous pity, the mocking laughter, it must have drawn forth. He felt inclined to rush forth, armed with a horsewhip, for the general flagellation of his acquaintance; could he discover Marie, and show her as his own, his valued, cherished wife, then people might see that the disappointment which furnished so charming a

source of gossip and condolence was by no means insupportable to him. No! Had his eyes been open from the first, he would still have preferred his own soft, piquant, shy, loving Marie, to the heiress, however wealthy or estimable she might be; that little, pale, quiet, matter-of-fact, self-reliant creature comparable to *his* wife, indeed!

It is well your wife taught you her value by her flight, Captain Neville!—for these favorable contrasts never crossed your mind in time to save her the anguish of feeling that she was wanting in the one thing for which she had been sought; and now, after all his efforts, he seemed as far from the object of his search as ever!

That confounded boy! Was there any just cause or impediment why he should not thrash *him* at all events?

How was it that the skill of detectives, the eagerness of affection, the perseverance of friendship, had alike failed!

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“Well, my dear boy,” said Mr. Foster, as his grandson and himself sat over an elaborate dessert in the handsome dining-room of his handsome house in Mecklenburgh Square on the evening after the interview just described—“You know I ought to be very seriously displeased with you—such a scheme for you to enter into; and I am not sure you did not origi-

nate it! However, it has been frustrated and recoiled pretty severely on the head of him who intended to profit by it. I am, therefore, inclined to deal indulgently with you. Tell me, now, does not my quiet little ward strike you as deserving all my eulogiums! She's a remarkable girl, an interesting young creature, lonely as she is, and possessed of a princely fortune."

"Yes, sir," replied the young Baronet, glancing off hastily to the first part of his grandfather's speech—"I am an obstinate dog, I admit; and really young heads are but wooden concerns sometimes; but you must not be hard on Neville. He is a fine fellow, and severely punished for taking my advice—there I acknowledge it, you see. Now my dear grandfather, I want you to be a real brick—forgive the whole affair, and use your powerful influence with the brother, to make up with Neville, and help him. Do, my dear sir! He'll find the wife some day, and then you know all sorts of little consequences will occur, and he'll want a pretty little villa, and nursemaids and things, and he'll want to make money—now he really is a clever fellow, and very steady—well, I mean *naturally*"—for old Mr. Foster elevated his eyebrows and shook his head. "His gambling and all that was merely the want of a real object in life. Suppose you and his brother take him into the concern as a junior partner."

"Zounds! sir!" cried the old gentleman, startled by so audacious a proposition into an old-fashioned exclamation—"Your modern assurance is overwhelming; pray what capital can your friend bring into the 'concern,' as you contemptuously term a business which is considerably your senior, and your grandfather's senior?"

"Really I don't know," returned Sir Frederic, with polite indifference, "but I *do* know he's a clever fellow and can be steady, would naturally take more interest in the—well, the business, than a stranger, and make you a better servant; that is, if he finds his wife; and, after all, the only drawback to my scheme is that it would be a real benefit to a friend of *mine*."

"Nay, you know I am ever ready to grant you everything—but confess it is rather cool of you to press Captain Neville upon me—the man who intended to frustrate my favorite project—for I will be frank with you, Fred; your union with Miss Delvigne is my favorite project, and you backing him up, too. 'Pon my soul, it is too bad, Fred!"

"I really cannot defend myself, sir. But I am sure, with your usual complaisance, you will bury the matter in oblivion—and—and—consider my plan, sir." This last was put in insinuatingly.

"Well, Fred, the morning you are married to Miss Delvigne all safe, I will begin to think the

matter over. That governess wife of Neville's may have drowned herself or hung herself. French women think nothing of suicide—and then—'pon my life—I shouldn't be surprised if he had another throw for the heiress!"

"Pooh, pooh! my dear grandfather, that would be an impossibility! In the first place, Miss Delvigne would not endure him."

"Why are you sure of that, eh?" asked the old gentleman, with a knowing look.

"Oh! it is self-evident. It would be an insult to her."

"Young ladies, my dear boy, are likely to fancy the first man that makes love to them, and *you* are the first in the field, Fred!"

"Thank you, sir! I don't much care for the first-come first-served principle in love. And, by Jove! I don't think Mary Delvigne is the style of girl to fancy the first thing in unmentionables who makes eyes at her! No, no! I dare-say she classes poor Neville and myself in the same lump, and despises us both. Then, consider, my dear sir, what an impression I must have made upon her mind, trying to marry her to my spendthrift friend, just to get rid of her. If she wasn't a deucedly uncommon sort of a girl she wouldn't hold any sort of intercourse with me. What a position to have put one's self into!" concluded the young Baronet, in a tone of deep vexation.

"Right, Fred, right! you describe your friend and transaction capitally."

"I don't admit that, sir. But such is the color it probably wears in Miss Delvigne's eyes."

"Never mind, my dear boy; a little coolness on your side will but fan the flame. Go, now, like a polite young gentleman, and spend the evening at Mrs. Coleman's. Say,—oh, say you wish to know how she feels after the fatigue of driving down to the Strand yesterday. And, a—give my love. Say I wish to know, and I am disposed to take a nap."

"I shall do no such thing, sir!" returned the dutiful grandson, with unusual abruptness, for he longed to obey, though a feeling of proud shyness kept him back. "I hate going to Mrs. Coleman's; the whole family, from 'buttons' up to the *grande madame* herself, look so infernally knowing—and are always dodging out of the room when I am there. I know it annoys Miss Delvigne, and it sets me furious! But I'll not interfere with you sir; I'll go down and see what Neville has done since morning. And I say, grandfather, for God's sake let my matrimonial destinies alone for a week or two. Do; and perhaps something better may offer elsewhere—a thousand or two more—to turn the scale, and free Miss Delvigne from prosecution on my account."

"Now, Fred, your sarcasm is all very fine;

but I believe in your heart you would be right well pleased to be married to my interesting little ward to-morrow. Come, own the truth, and don't disdain my help!"

Sir Frederic shook his head, laughed with recovered good humor at the old gentleman's sally, and saying, "Till to-morrow, then, good-by," walked out into the hall, whence the faint odor of a supreme cheroot was presently wafted.

Old Mr. Foster took a pinch of snuff and smiled, filled another glass of port, which he drank slowly, with the utmost gusto, then, with a sigh of gastronomic satisfaction and virtuous content, threw his silk handkerchief over his bald head and settled himself to slumber.

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Neville sat gloomily alone, his papers pushed aside, his head on his hands, when Compton entered. He welcomed his friend warmly; indeed since his troubles his manner had lost a good deal of the hard composure that formerly distinguished it.

"You are a good fellow, Compton, to drop in upon my disconsolate solitude."

"Have a cheroot," said the sympathizing friend, "and tell me what you have done since."

"Well, nothing!"

And Neville proceeded to narrate his fruitless expedition to the Waterloo Station, and the

faint hopes he entertained of discovering the cab-driver who took poor Marie from it.

"They will certainly find the man," said Sir Frederic. "They always do find these people."

And their conversation flowed on in a somewhat broken stream, on the *pros* and *cons* of this unhappy subject.

They were not talkative, yet it was a sort of comfort to Guy to have Compton with him, and the young Baronet knew it was.

An hour had nearly slipped away, when a cab was heard to stop, and a sharp, yet indefinite double knock was performed on the knocker.

"That's some fellow uncertain of his position but sure of his errand," said Sir Frederic, and almost as he spoke the detective entered, without asking permission.

"Well, Captain," he said, "we have him; not long about it, eh, sir?"

"What! the cab-driver from Waterloo Station?"

"He is below, sir, cab and all, ready to drive us to the house where he took the lady. He says he can't direct us, but he can take us there."

Neville had his hat on, while Pim spoke, in silent readiness.

"Hurrah!" cried the impetuous Baronet. "You're on the trail at last! God speed you, old boy; all will go right now."

"I shall not hope or fear yet," said Neville,

with a deep sigh, "for if we are baffled here my resources at last are at an end."

"Well, sir, I think we have a fair course now; the people where she went will put us on her track. Come on, sir. It's over by Kennington way, and we had better get there before dark. That little Irish warmint has a deal of ingenuity. Lord! what a man he'd make by and by for the Force! Come along, sir."

Sir Frederic shook Neville's hand cordially, and accompanied him downstairs; bid him God speed once more, and stood looking after the vehicle as it disappeared; then remembering the last occasion when he looked after him, and its differing circumstances, he recalled the sudden gloom which then, in so unaccountable a manner, fell upon him. "I trust my present hopefulness will be equally prophetic," he thought.

He lingered yet a moment undecidedly, then suddenly throwing away his cigar, said, half aloud,

"Yes, I ought, I must, lose no time in letting her know," so he walked quickly into the Strand, hailed a "Hansom," and directed the driver to St. John's Wood.

CHAPTER XVII.

MEANTIME Neville and Mr. Pim sped away towards Kennington. The former had addressed no question to the driver; an undefinable feeling held him back. Had he been alone with the man he might have cross-examined him, for, in truth, he longed to put a thousand queries, and to hear, perchance, what her lips had uttered, even through the medium of a cab-driver's repetition.

What if they should find her where they were going; sad, lonely, almost penniless! With what rapture he would hold her to his heart! How tenderly he would reproach her! How amply he would atone for the agony he had thoughtlessly inflicted. But at the recollection of the dumb despair she had evinced—the stricken, agonized expression of those eyes—his heart, which had beaten so tumultuously at the idea of a possible speedy re-union, seemed for a moment to stand still. “Can I ever,” he asked himself, “ever atone for the pain I have inflicted?”

“I suppose you are sure of your man?” he said, turning uneasily to his companion.

"Eh? Oh! of course. He remembers the lady well, he says, for she didn't rightly seem to know where she wanted to go to, and seemed strange-like, to him. And her box had a London Bridge label on it—from Folkestone—that struck him, seeing as how he had taken her up at 'Waterloo.'"

"She didn't rightly seem to know where she wanted to go!"

Those words appeared to burn into Neville's brain. His soft, bright, loving Marie cast off—without a friend, without a hope—"not knowing where to go."

The drive seemed interminable, but at length they stopped to pay the toll at Kennington Gate, and a few minutes after turned into a quiet, respectable little by-street. Here the pace slackened—grew slower still—and finally the driver pulled up, and turning, tapped at the front window. Neville eagerly lowered it.

"This is the street; I am sure enough about that, but the houses puzzle me. You see they are all alike, and I never noticed the number. There's one there, with a card in the window, that looks about it, but I see another lower down; yet I think it was this first one that I stopped at."

"We will try," said Neville, feeling his pulse increasing, and his mouth dry.

He and the detective alighted.

"Knock and speak," he said to his companion;
"I can do nothing."

Mr. Pim nodded.

The door was opened by a neat servant, and Mr. Pim had scarce uttered the words, "You have some rooms to let, I see," when she shouted in the direction of the kitchen stairs,

"Missus, missus, two gents about the apartments!"

An invocation which was speedily answered by the apparition of a stout female in afternoon (*i.e.* full) toilette, and a condition of the highest respectability.

"Good evening, mum," said the detective; while Neville politely raised his hat. "May I ask what rooms you have?"

"Only this parlor, sir, and a very nice bedroom upstairs. Afraid I cannot accommodate two."

"Will you let us have a look, mum?"

"Certainly!" and the benign landlady threw open the door of a little parlor.

"Pretty little room," said the detective, with an air of easy patronage. "Many other inmates?"

"No, sir. One highly-respectable gent, as has been in the drawing-rooms nigh two years, and a young man in an office, what you never hears nothink of—and—"

"What!" cried Neville, unable to keep silence

any longer, "No young lady? No dark-haired, tall, slight young lady?"

"Well, now, Captain," the much-enduring Mr. Pim was beginning in accents of remonstrance, when the respectable landlady, interrupting in her turn, exclaimed—

"No; there's no such young lady here; but I had one, as I was uncommon doubtful of, about a fortnight ago, for a few days."

"Good God!" exclaimed Neville, "and she is gone. Where, my good woman? Pray speak!"

"That's just what I cannot tell, sir, but—"

"Stop!" said Mr. Pim, "let us make sure it is our bird. How and when did this lady come, ma'am? There's a handsome reward for whatever will lead to her discovery."

"Well, I *did* think there was something peculiar about her," cried the now excited landlady, who went into a long story, describing the young lady's arrival, the warming of her own heart towards her—the kind attentions she had lavished on the weary stranger; the advice she had given her, and how the poor young creature feared she could not get pupils, and thought of going out as a milliner's drudge, or taking in plain work; of the exhortations of her (Mrs. Jupp, such was her name) "that she should write to her friends; that she did write, but took the letter to the post herself, and stayed out very

late that night, too, and went and took other apartments."

"Where, where?" ejaculated Neville.

That was, unfortunately, just what Mrs. Jupp could not tell.

"Well, do you know where she came from, at least?"

"She came from Southampton, with the intention, she said, of looking for pupils. She said she was a French lady."

"What was she like?" asked the detective.

"Oh, tall and slight, with big, dark eyes, very pale and sad-looking, and spoke very low and sweet, not quite like an Englishwoman."

"It must be Marie," said Neville, almost unconsciously.

"Yes, sir—it was; for the evening she wrote such a lot, and counted over her money. She tore up a lot of papers, and there was Mary, spelt queer, on one scrap as I picked up."

"And," asked the detective, "what reason did she give for leaving your house?"

"Well, you see, my rooms is rather first-class, and she said as how they was rather expensive. She wanted a bedroom only, but that was not at all in my line, so she left."

Mrs. Jupp paused abruptly, and Neville ground his teeth in silent agony at the picture of struggle and desolation thus conjured up.

"Then you can give us no further trace?"

he ejaculated, loth to relinquish this last hope. "Remember, I will give fifty pounds to whoever will supply such information as may lead to her discovery."

"Law, now, think of that!" returned the discomfited, conscience-stricken Mrs. Jupp. "Let me ask the girl," she added.

And she called "Susan" audibly enough down the stairs.

"Susan," she repeated, as that individual appeared, "you remember the lady as come here from the Waterloo Station, about a fortnight past, and paid in advance to be took in?"

"Yes, 'm, I do," said Susan.

"Well, did you notice the cab she went off in?"

"No, 'm. Don't you know as you were angry with me for helping her down with her box, and set me to clean the back kitchen, so she got a cab herself, and—"

"There—there—those girls do talk so fast!" exclaimed Mrs. Jupp, eager to cut short these revelations.

"Come away," said Neville, with fierce impatience to his ally. "Don't you see they turned her out, and have lost all trace of her?" and he walked away, deaf to the eager explanations of the landlady, with whom Mr. Pim lingered to exchange a few more words, and then followed his employer.

They took their places once more in the cab.

"Where to?" asked cabby.

"Eh? Back again, I suppose, sir," said Pim, in a rather crestfallen tone.

"Ay—back. We have played our last card, returned Neville, in a strange, hard, bitter voice.

"Well, it does look blue," returned the detective, "though—"

But Neville did not hear—at last—at last, hope failed him. He had had such a fearfully suggestive glimpse of his beloved one's present condition, subjected to all the spurns that wait on poverty—the dangers—the difficulties!

And she was alone—he had driven her to it; and now he could not atone, he could not find her. They were drifting farther and farther apart on the gloomy sea of life! Great God! what straits might she now be reduced to—what snares might not be closing round her, so young, so lovely, so deserted!

CHAPTER XVIII.

WE must now retrace the course of events with Marie, and go back to the agitated evening on which Neville and Sir Frederic had sought Miss Redoubt. It closed gloomily, with a thick, warm rain; and the atmosphere seemed a ton or two heavier than usual.

In a small back parlor in one of the narrow streets leading from the main line near Kenningtón Gate, neatly and stiffly furnished, sat Mrs. Guy Neville. Before her was a penny ink-bottle, a few sheets of note paper, and her pen.

She had taken her whole fortune from her *porte-monnaie*, and was counting it—seven gold sovereigns and a half, eight shillings, and a few halfpence.

She spread them out before her, and gazed upon them sadly.

The night before she had slept heavily—the dreamless sleep of exhaustion. The day had passed in a sort of agonized bewilderment, and now she had roused herself to think, and to do.

To do what? A difficult question; but of a necessity, something. There lay her all, and

she had nowhere to turn when it was exhausted.

On reaching London the night before, she had decided on Kennington as the locality farthest from all she had hitherto known of London; and after passing the toll-gate, shrinking from the noise and publicity of the main road, had directed the cab-driver to turn down the first quiet, shady-looking street she observed. Here a plentiful crop of "Apartments to let" offered her a choice, and selecting one at random, she submitted to a very galling cross-examination before she could gain admittance, and did so at last only by paying a week's rent in advance.

Here, the excitement and sense of wrong gradually subsiding, she would almost have hailed death as a deliverer from the appalling sense of desolation under which she was ready to sink.

And now what to do? First, she must get cheaper lodgings—these two miserable rooms cost her twenty-one shillings. A bedroom would be quite enough.

She knew how difficult, even under favorable circumstances, it was to gain employment of any kind, and under hers, what a task! She must spin out her little capital to the very utmost. Surely, in three months, she would either succeed or be no more. But seven pounds!

Could she pay rent and live upon it for thirteen weeks? Alas! even her moderate estimate showed the difficulty.

What could she do? She could teach French and Italian well. She could draw cleverly, and was singularly expert with her little pretty fingers at all kinds of needle-work; but if there was an art in which she especially excelled, it was millinery. In music, she thought herself deficient. To what should she turn? Should she consult her landlady? Yes! though a more awful specimen of the *genus* can scarce be imagined.

She rang, and asked in her quiet, gentle tones, if Mrs. Jupp was disengaged, and if she could see her.

Yes, Mrs. Jupp *was* disengaged, and at her young lodger's disposal.

In truth Marie's air of distinction, her sweet, winning manner, and sad, innocent face, had roused the curiosity and almost the heart of the veteran Mrs. Jupp; but this latter commodity had lain too long in a fossil state to show much vitality, and, indeed, had probably been born dead. But Mrs. Jupp opined there was a mystery in the wind—an aristocratic mystery too. Might not the elegant young lady in the back parlor have escaped from some tyrannical Earl of a father, and then what a halo would surround 17, Acacia Row! Mrs. Jupp had serious

thoughts of venturing four shillings and sixpence on an advertisement, beginning "Supposed to have strayed from her friends." Well would it have been had she done so; but the ensuing conversation soon dispersed such airy visions.

"Good-evening," said Marie, as Mrs. Jupp, in a substantial "afternoon's" dress, a stern cap with pink ribbons, a bow of hair over each temple, well secured by a band of black velvet, opened the door.

"Good-evening, miss," returned the landlady, and relapsed into watchful silence.

Mrs. Jupp was stout, and short of breath; indeed respiration was a series of mild snores, and the *bust* of the brown merino afternoon garment bore the aspect of an eccentrically-shaped pin-cushion, stuffed until the texture of the covering could hold no more.

"Pray, sit down," resumed Marie, somewhat embarrassed how to begin. "I have troubled you to come to me for I want a little advice in a matter which my ignorance of your customs renders difficult."

"She's a Lord's daughter, at the very least, and wants to pass herself as my servant gal, or summut like that," thought Mrs. Jupp.

"I've a deal of experience, miss," she returned guardedly, "having kept lodgings close on twenty years; and if that doesn't show you life,

I don't know what does. I'll be happy to give you the best advice I can."

"Thank you," said Marie. "You see I am a total stranger here, having come over from France to endeavor to earn my own bread, either by teaching or needle-work, or—Do you think I should be likely to gain pupils in this neighborhood?"

"I'm sure I can't tell," replied Mrs. Jupp, reluctant to relinquish her theory of the Earl's daughter. "My connection has always been very genteel; I never had no lodgers but what was in an independent way of business."

"I should much like to get a few pupils," began poor Marie; "and I thought of writing a card, and leaving it at the nearest library, or chemist's shop—places where people stop and talk, you know—or an advertisement? Or, should you think I could get employment in any of those monstrous millinery establishments I passed in driving here from the station? I have a taste for millinery."

"What station?" asked Mrs. Jupp.

"Waterloo," returned Marie, with an air of unmistakable truth.

"She's come from Southampton," thought Mrs. Jupp, "and she knows too much to be a Lord's daughter; that card dodge would never enter into one of their heads, I'll be bound. No, no; she's just a foreign chit scrambling after what she can pick up."

"I am sure these sort of things is quite out of my line, miss," said Mrs. Jupp aloud. "I dare say you'd have a better chance at the millinery, if you have no recommendations; but what do I know about them?" she concluded, rather scornfully.

Marie winced and colored; she felt she had made a mistake in confiding to this cast-metal imitation of humanity.

"One word more, and I will detain you no longer. Could you let me have a bedroom alone? I find the rent of two rooms more than I can meet."

"A bedroom only!" repeated Mrs. Jupp. "No, by no means! My drawing-rooms is let this two years and more to a most respectable party what dines in the City, and I have just this room and your bedroom besides, and I could not break the set."

"Then," said Marie—her heart sinking at the idea of being cast adrift from even this icy refuge—"I must leave you next Thursday."

"Well, I was thinking as much," returned the landlady, with the easy familiarity with which the vulgar address those they consider inferiors. "There's lots of little places nearer town, and the shops as would suit you better—though a respectable residence is quite necessary if you take to teaching."

"On Thursday then ; and I need trouble you no further," said poor Marie sadly.

"Thursday, before noon ; if after that, you're liable for another week ; and you'll not mind my showing the apartments, though you are in them—not to lose time."

Without deigning to wait a reply, Mrs. Jupp sailed out of the room, and Marie was again alone.

Alone—terribly alone.

No mere words could express the terrible sense of desolation which wrapped her like an icy winding-sheet. It numbed and stupefied her.

What should she do ? Should she write to her old French aunt, who had been her only friend since her father's death, and tell her she had changed her employment ? or should she keep silence ?

The old lady had never shown her much affection ; indeed, she looked on her as a lost sheep, because Marie had always held to Protestantism.

Still Guy might through this relative gain some clue to her ; *if* he took the trouble of seeking. Ah ! would he care for, and wish her back ? Down in the secret depths of her heart she hoped he would ; and also in those secret depths she hid a sort of unacknowledged, undefined hope, that in thus letting this remote

clue escape her, she held by a slender thread—yet still a thread—to the delicious but momentary past.

She wrote guardedly, and without an address, merely informing her aunt that she had changed her abode and employers—that she was well, and would write soon again when she was more settled; but that she was at present in excellent health and spirits.

When this was accomplished, it was still but seven o'clock; and, prompted by the restlessness of misery, she determined herself to seek her way to the post. Rolling herself in a large shawl, she made a few inquiries of the servant, and soon discovered the required locality—too soon.

She could not return yet, so she strolled till she lost her way, and at last found herself beside a large white-washed building, the windows of which showed a strong light within, and from the open doors of which came forth a strong, deep tide of human voices, intoning with tolerable accuracy the well-known hymn—

“There is a land of pure delight.”

An impulse to enter, and taste even the vague companionship of a multitude of strangers—even the shadowy sympathy of common prayer—seized her. The seats were full, and many stood in the aisles. The warm atmosphere and

volume of sound, the nameless, hushed excitement, drew her for a moment from herself. By degrees the gradual movement of those behind her pressed Marie forward; and when the hymn ceased, she was beside a small pew, occupied by a large woman, three little girls from five to ten, and a rough-looking, sandy-haired boy of twelve, with a red comforter round his throat, who was always trying to choke down a cough.

Marie had stood a few seconds by the door, when the large woman suddenly turned a broad, kindly, and surprisingly-youthful face towards her. She immediately stretched a stout arm across her little flock, thereby disarranging their hats considerably, and signed to the rough boy to open the door—indicating with a polite smile to Marie, that she might enter. The boy stepped out to accommodate her entrance, and she found herself next a blue-eyed, flaxen-haired mite, who looked up, half-smiling, half-awed, in her face.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TALL, quaint man, with wild-looking hair, who had mounted the pulpit, upraised a bony hand, and now the congregation bent in prayer ; it was a long, rambling oration, telling a great deal about sin and temptation and the devil, but asking for nothing intelligibly ; and Marie's attention began to wander back to her own troubles.

Then they sang another hymn—a sweet old tune, “Rock of Ages—which affected poor Marie inexpressibly.

Then the sermon began—a quaint and stirring discourse, which riveted our heroine's attention ; and in the preacher's eloquent description of how to win the entrance of that world “where all sighing and sorrow is at end,” and all “tears wiped from off all faces,” she forgot the crowd—all—save the blessed picture, till she was roused from the vision by the flaxen-head falling against her in more than the heaviness of sleep.

Marie looked down, the pretty little round face was deadly pale. She felt one of the small ungloved and not very clean hands, it was icy

cold. She leaned across and whispered to the fat woman—

“I fear your little girl is not well—as I am next the door I will lift her out.”

“Oh, dear! goodness gracious!” whispered the mother, eagerly, “whatever are we to do?” (She said “hever.”)

But Marie made no reply, except to lift the unconscious child, an effort almost too much for her strength; and rousing the rough-headed boy from an uneasy slumber, she carried her little burden to the door, where she was speedily followed by the frightened mother and the other children, while an attendant of the chapel brought them a glass of water.

“I never saw her like this before,” said the alarmed mother, “though she is a delicate little creature. Agnes, my pet, speak to mamma.”

“Do not be too much alarmed,” said Marie, quietly. “I have seen children overcome by the heat and exhausted atmosphere of a crowd, very readily;” and she tenderly removed the child’s hat, and bathed her brow with water.

Soon the little girl opened her large blue eyes, and smiled at the mother, then putting her hand to her head, said faintly—

“Albert, you naughty boy; you’ve been throwing water on my head.”

“Never mind,” said Marie, kissing her, “we’ll

soon make it nice and dry," and she began wiping it with her handkerchief.

"Oh!" cried the mother, the tears in her eyes, "you're quite well now, Agnes dear—you must not turn like that again."

"Don't frighten her," whispered Marie; "let her forget she was faint."

"Well, and I'm sure 'm, I'm forever obliged to you for your kindness and help. If you'd been the child's mother, you couldn't have treated her gentler," exclaimed the fat lady heartily. "I hope you'll let me know who I am so much indebted to! And now, how to get the poor thing home! it's a good step, and we're out of the omnibus line."

"A cab," suggested Marie.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed her new friend eagerly, "I never enter a cab. It's that way half the diseases are caught—they take all sorts of subjects to hospitals, and you don't know what—no, we'll just get along quietly; Albert will help to carry his sister, and—"

"If my accompanying you will be of use," began Marie, glad to find any distraction to her thoughts.

"H'oh! you're quite too good; I could not think of troubling you—really you *are* good."

"I am glad to be of any use—let me go with, and help you," returned Marie; "your little girl

seems content with me—I will carry her a little while—shall I Agnes?”

“Yes, please,” said Agnes, with a sigh of content, and laying her head on Marie’s shoulder.

“Well, now, that is surprising! I never see Agnes take to a stranger before.”

The fat lady gathered her flock about her, and hoisted a cotton umbrella over the head of the invalid—for there was still a slight drizzle—and the party turning to the left (the opposite direction from which Marie had approached), proceeded down a long, dark road, which seemed interminable to Marie, though her little burden was not now quite so heavy as when unconscious. At length she was obliged to stop.

“Let me walk now,” said the child, “and hold the lady’s hand—why shouldn’t I walk?”

“We might let her, I think,” said her mother, appealing to Marie.

To which Marie agreed.

“As we are so far, ’m, I hope you’ll stop and take a bit of supper, ’m,” continued Marie’s new acquaintance.

“I do feel so much obliged, and I should like my husband, who is very partial to the child, to thank you.”

“Well, mamma,” cried the eldest girl, a keen hatchet-faced, dark-eyed imp, “you see, if Jemimar ain’t out, that’s all! and you’ll not be able

to get no supper, I tell you! She always is out when we go to chapel."

"Hold your tongue, Augusta Jane!" said the mother placidly. "Yes, 'm, I should feel obliged if you'd join us in our evening meal. Mr. Bushel (my name's Bushel) would be so happy."

"You are very good," said Marie, "I will accompany you home; perhaps," she thought, "I might get these little girls for pupils."

"We are living in a very humble way at present," continued Mrs. Bushel. "My husband has not been fortunate, though he is of a good old county family in Devonshire, and I am not able to bring up my children in the way I should like—as I was brought up by my late Pa, who was well known in the city—but when we cannot control circumstances, we had best bow to them, especially when we know they are sent to make us sit loose to earthly things. Nevertheless, there are certain habits of life I can never relinquish; and I trust our home, though humble, is genteel."

And, regardless of reply, the fat lady plunged into a long personal history of the elegancies of her earlier days—the distinguished friends of her late pa—his unmerited misfortunes—the various mysterious enemies of her husband—a man of the highest refinement, who played on the flute.

"Because you see, 'm, if his eldest second cousin was to die, there would only be an old

gentleman of seventy, and a baby eighteen months old, between him and a splendid estate in North Devon; but they are such a proud lot, they never forgive him for marrying me—though, after all, if they come to that, my poor mother's great-aunt was presented to George the Third, and I've a miniature of her in powder; and the furniture we now have, plain but substantial, was bought with my money. Law, bless me! don't you go lift that heavy child again. Come to mamma, Agnes, dearie."

So she ran on, branching off into inextricable details, resulting in nothing particular, but intended to enlighten Marie as to all particulars of her history.

Marie scarce heard, but took a quiet glance at the *tournure* of the party.

Mrs. Bushel was a stout woman with a kindly, honest face, fair hair, and a double chin, and mountainous shoulders; she was attired in a light dress of some gray material, with very full flounces striped with broad blue bands, a black silk cloak of fashionable shape, but showing by many a half-obliterated streak and shiny mark where former seams and plaits had lain; her bonnet touched the parting between the back and front hair, where a wreath of tumbled flowers were crushed under the narrow leaf (it was the era of small bonnets).

The children were equally characteristic—

they all had tight, long, colored stockings and boots, more or less worn, and ill-fastened hair nets, and hats, with mangy feathers, flounced frocks, the flounces a good deal ripped; still the two younger did not look absolutely common, they were naturally "genteel." But the boy was hopeless, a sort of figure you see playing hop-sotch in the street with the newsboy, and the doctor's boy, etc.

Before Marie had well concluded her observations, they paused at the gate of a small house in a small row, with small gardens, and Marie read on a large zinc plate, which nearly swallowed up the gate, "E. Bushel, Coal Agent, etc."

Here, after ringing for some time, a slatternly girl opened the door, over which, by the light of a small gas jet, Marie perceived a white card indicating lodgings to let. She felt a sort of dreary comfort in this.

The fat lady was a slattern, the children were slatternly, the air of a daily and hourly scramble hung about the whole concern, yet the people were evidently kindly and respectable. Here, surely, she might find shelter at a moderate rate.

It was getting late, and she was anxious to return, yet she would not lose this chance, so she waited patiently while Mrs. Bushel bustled into a tiny front parlor and lit the gas, entreated her new friend to remove her bonnet, turned a deaf ear to Marie's observations that she could

not possibly remain, and despatched Albert for some beer, and Augusta Jane to tell Jemimar to bring up the bread and cheese.

Here Mr. Bushel made his appearance—a tall, seedy, helpless-looking man, with a tolerably good face, and an innocent expression, long, lanky legs, terminating in large carpet slippers of remote antiquity.

He brought with him a faint, stale odor of smoke, and was very quiet and civil. To him Mrs. Bushel volubly detailed the sudden seizure of little Agnes (who speedily nestled on her father's knee), and described, glowingly, the kindness of the young lady, etc.

"I do not think any one could have done less for the pretty child," said Marie. "And now, if you will excuse my leaving you abruptly, I must do so, as I wish to return to my present lodgings."

She paused.

"I see," she resumed, "a card in your window. May I ask if you let any part of your house?"

An eager rejoinder that the drawing-room floor was vacant and at her service was Mrs. Bushel's reply.

Whereupon, Marie, in a few words, explained that she had come to England to seek employment, and could not afford luxurious quarters—that she was a total stranger, and unable to offer any references; but that if, under these circum-

stances, they would let her engage a bedroom, she would be happy to do so.

With very little hesitation this was agreed to ; and Marie, before many minutes were over, had inspected and taken a small back bedroom at the large sum of seven shillings per week. Here she agreed to move on the following Monday.

"I used to give lessons in France," she concluded, after arranging with Mrs. Bushel. "But here I must get more immediate employment ; at least, until I can make some friends ; and I think of endeavoring to do needlework. I, too, have seen vicissitudes, my dear madam !"

"Dear, dear ! to think of that !" cried Mrs. Bushel.

At the word lesson, she had glanced at her three little girls, who, from babyhood, shared the family councils.

"Well, any one can see you're a lady, at any rate ; but dear, dear ! you'll do nothing at the needle. We'll see what we can do when you come here—and now, what name?"

This puzzled Marie for a moment. She felt instinctively that she must not give her own name and she was unprepared with another ; but she speedily recovered, and recalling at random some of her father's few relations, said calmly,

"Madlle. Thibaut, No. —, Acacia Row."

"Oh !" replied Mrs. Bushel, "a French lady !

I thought you did not speak English quite like us," and she smiled graciously.

The bare notion of her children having lessons from a real live Frenchwoman, fresh, perhaps, from Paris, raised Mrs. Bushel at once to a pinnacle of gentility she had scarce ever hoped to reach.

Marie begged a cab might be called, as she feared to return so late alone; and as Mrs. Bushel did not now suggest any fearful results from the indulgence of that extravagance, she took her leave. "I do declare Providence has given us a chance for getting a bit of education for the children," cried the mother when she returned to the parlor.

"Well," said Mr. Bushel, stroking the head of his little Agnes, "I don't know, but it's not very prudent. Eh!"

"Law! Bushel, you never have no faith or enterprise; she's a lady, and a sweet creature, and she shall teach these dear lambs French, and perhaps music."

CHAPTER XX.

AND Marie knelt in agonized yet thankful supplication.

“If I can but maintain myself awhile honestly, perhaps Guy will seek me out! Oh! Guy, Guy! why did you speak so cruelly, and yet you did love me? The greed for my supposed fortune could not have given your eyes such a light—your tones so much tenderness.”

After striving to fix some plan for the morrow, and struggling with the bitter memories, the sad anticipations which crowded on her, she wept herself to sleep—the beloved name still on her lips.

The morrow broke bright and clear—so bright that Marie felt fearful every one would recognize and brand her as a runaway wife; for to aggravate her sufferings, doubts would every now and then cross her, whether in acting on the wild impulse of wounded feeling she had done right. She knew she had not deceived Captain Neville. Ought she to have stayed by him, and lived down his suspicions; now could her wild scheme of disappearing forever enable him to

marry; or would it not inflict fresh injury upon him? But then how could she remain to eat the bread of a man who loathed her as the source of his ruin? Banished from his path, he might think of her with tenderness and regret, and this alone was worth agonies to secure; present with him, he would view her with impatience and disgust, or at best with forced endurance, and to this death was incomparably preferable!

Who can say that she was not right? Our hero was but an average man, and average men are not often gifted with the generosity that can forgive an injury to dear self, however unconsciously committed, especially when the inflictor is within sight.

Separation—especially if that separation involves the loss of something not otherwise attainable, may restore tenderness. Marie erred, no doubt, erred in judgment, common sense, even principle, in leaving her husband; but had she remained, it is not pleasant to think what might have been her lot even with a man who is supposed to have more reason, more self-control, more breadth of character than women possess; even with a gentleman supposed by birth and profession to be imbued with the exalted sentiment called chivalry!

Better, far, O reader! in such a dilemma, be cast on the native generosity of a woman humble in origin, lowly in nurture, than upon

the reason, self-control, and chivalry of any "average gentleman!"

"I must act, not dream," thought poor Marie, as she went through the form of swallowing a cup of tea and a morsel of bread. She felt strangely averse to resume her old occupation of teaching—first, it would recall such bitter remembrances—secondly, she felt too changed by trouble to do it properly. Some little variety of employment she craved for; so, after informing her landlady that she had taken other lodgings, and dressing herself in the most work-womanlike-way she could devise, she sallied forth—first, to find her way to her new friends, and from that to proceed, after taking counsel with Mrs. Bushel, to some of the great millinery depôts she had noticed.

Mrs. Bushel, who had been giving Marie's future room a "regular turn-out," received her most graciously; a handkerchief tied over her head, and a carpet-broom in her hand.

"I thought I'd just make all right at once, and then you can come in when you like. You'll excuse my appearance, but inexperienced servants require to be personally looked after," said Mrs. Bushel, in one of her frequent bursts of gentility.

Marie got the names of two large emporiums of Millinery for the Million, and one or two general shops, the directions to which she wrote

down carefully, and proceeded to the farthest first—intending to work her way slowly back.

It was a weary walk, yet she felt little or none of the depression which a search for employment would have thrown over a girl with less practical experience of life. She had been educated to earn her bread,—and to earn that bread honestly,—to give full value for the money received, never suggested to her any idea of degradation. She was, in the highest sense, a gentlewoman, and a refined one. Nevertheless her whole life was a totally different grade from her husband's. She could not imagine the repugnance with which he would have regarded her proceedings—the degradation he would have considered such an occupation! She was dimly conscious that aristocrats disdained to soil their hands; but she did not realize it as an absolute fact. No work, in her estimation, left so indelible a stain upon the hand as the gold *bestowed* which *might* be earned: besides, as the rod of Aaron swallowed up those of the magicians, so the terrible blow which had fallen on her hushed all minor sorrows.

Her first two applications were at once rejected—not rudely, people are not gratuitously rude, especially men, to women with soft voices—for Marie's carefully-arranged veil left but a shadowy glimpse of her face. The third was at a general shop, not on a very large scale. Here

she had a rather lengthened interview with a tall, thin, mechanical female, who cross-examined her closely; but when she found she was French, and had studied millinery in Paris, she seemed better disposed towards the applicant.

"You had better leave me your address, and if we require an additional hand I'll send for you. I can say no more at present."

Marie accordingly wrote down her adopted name and new address, and went on to the last place on her list with rather a sinking heart. What if she could get no employment! What was to become of her? Return to France with the disastrous story to her old aunt, whose very first act (she felt, rather than thought) would be to enforce her claims, if she had any, upon her husband? She unconsciously quickened her pace, and eagerly inquired the nearest way to Wire and Netall's emporium of millinery.

It was a monster establishment—three or four shops in one—with vast windows, gay with bonnets, caps and hats of every hue, ticketed with fabulously low prices. Crowds of women and children lounged outside, making imaginary choice, while within crowds of women of every grade and age—from the well-dressed lady, whose brougham awaited her, and who hoped her fifteen-shilling piece of finery would pass for a Bond Street article at "two ten," to poor Sarah Jane, the maid-of-all-work, expending her month's

wages to captivate the baker's young man—almost bewildered the experienced young ladies, and ran the little cashiers nearly off their legs.

Indifferent though she was, Marie almost shrank from the din and tumult. Nevertheless she penetrated the arena, and was immediately addressed by the only individual apparently at leisure in the crowd, a well-dressed and almost fashionable man, with a white tie, who asked, with a fascinating smile, "And what can we do for you, 'm?"

Marie remembered the effect which her French origin had before produced. With a pardonable *ruse* she spoke rather brokenly, and preferred her request for employment with more of foreign gesture than natural to her.

"Oh! you are a French lady, I presume," said her interrogator; "have the goodness to step this way;" and he opened a door covered by a large looking-glass, which admitted them from the splendors of the showroom to the darkest, meanest, dirtiest of little staircases.

At the top of this, in a box rather than a room, was another man, not so fresh in attire, with a meagre, hunted, anxious look, but cool and quiet in manner; he was surrounded by piles of millinery boxes, and piles of papers, files of papers, oceans of papers; and was dictating something to a yellow-looking boy, crammed in between a whitened window and a rugged desk.

"New hand, Mr. Frump," said Marie's conductor.

"Oh!" said Mr. Frump. "Been in any English house of business?"

Marie stated she had studied millinery in Paris, and was quite a stranger, therefore without references.

"Awkward, rather, is it not?"-replied Mr. Frump; and after a short whisper with the gentleman in the white tie, Marie was taken upstairs to a large, low workroom, crowded with pale, pasty-looking girls; and having gone through a cross-examination by a severe-looking woman, fashionably dressed in black, was informed she might come on trial for a week without pay, and after, if she suited, would receive six shillings per week and her dinner, for which she was to work from nine to eight.

Some material was then given to her, and with a short break, about two o'clock, when she went, with the second batch of workers, to dinner, she sat till seven. By that time she had finished two caps, which were favorably received by the forewoman, who merely observed she must be quicker in future, as time was money.

The dinner, though of good and wholesome food, was not very appetizing by the time the second relay reached the table, nevertheless Marie was thankful. Here was the bare means of subsistence, at any rate.

"Easier work and better grub than at the grand West End establishments," as one experienced worker whispered.

"If I am to go so early to-morrow morning," thought Marie, "would it not be better to settle myself at Mrs. Bushel's to-night?"

She therefore determined to call there first, and acquaint her new landlady with her intention. Very weary and dizzy, yet upheld by the hope of self-support, she struggled on. She must sustain the life which God had given her, though it held out little prospect of a cheering nature.

Mrs. Bushel was as gracious as usual, and rather more genteel. She was very glad to find Marie had so far succeeded, and perfectly ready to receive her at once.

"I think you have brought me luck, my dear," she said; "we've let the drawing-rooms to such a nice young man, from the City. To breakfast and tea here; me providing, and two-and-thirty a week! I only wish you had a genteeler engagement. But we must try and get you some pupils. Have some tea before you go on."

"Not till I return, thank you," said Marie, fearful of resting till all was accomplished.

She therefore toiled on to Acacia Row, and in spite of Mrs. Jupp's exclamations and contemptuous surprise, insisted on settling all extra charges, the amount of which rather surprised her. At

last, however, all was arranged. Mrs. Jupp disdained to make any inquiries; and after helping the servant to take down her box, Marie went herself to call a cab.

CHAPTER XXI.

MARIE had been now four or five days at her new employment, and felt as though an equal number of years intervened between her past and present, so wide and impassable seemed the gulf that separated her from Guy and the flash of momentary happiness connected with him.

As she settled into her routine, and morning and evening brought no romantic discovery—such as she dimly, unconsciously, hoped for—she seemed to drift farther and farther into oblivion, and a heavy gloom weighed her down, lending a sad, pained, longing look to her sweet, dark eyes, and inexpressible mournfulness to the smile with which she strove to speak to Mrs. Bushel's children. She felt herself quickly becoming a mere working machine, toiling for the daily bread, so tasteless and unpalatable, unseasoned as it was by the salt of hope.

The minor discomforts of Mrs. Bushel's scrambling establishment were swallowed up in her constant sense of griefs, and so the hours rolled on.

“Your tea is all ready for you, my dear,”

said her kindly, untidy landlady, one evening, towards the close of her first week, as Marie entered. "Just let me come in and speak to you a bit, while you take it. You're very late."

"Come in, pray," said Marie, ascending rapidly, and opening her door.

Mrs. Bushel panted after, and threw herself into the first chair.

"Now, you see, I only want yes or no. Don't you think I want to over-persuade you; but I thought it might be a mutual benefit," began Mrs. Bushel, as Marie removed her bonnet.

"Yes," she replied, interrogatively.

"Well, we've had a rather advantageous offer from the young gent in the drawing-rooms, to accommodate a chum of his, if we could make out another bedroom; so I thought I'd make you a proposal to change your room for one in the next floor to the front—a nice little place—not quite so large as this," looking round as though she surveyed an area of vast extent—"but a more cheerful look-out, and a nice iron bedstead. Then, if you have no objection to give my little girls a French lesson every evening—say an hour—I shall consider the rent of my room paid. You see it will be a mutual advantage."

"Thank you," said Marie. "I should like to see the room."

"Oh, yes, by all means!" replied her hostess,

bouncing up ; " and then I'll tell Mr. Tucker to-morrow, when I know your answer."

The room was undoubtedly small, and the cheerful look-out existed rather in Mrs. B.'s imagination. Nevertheless, Marie was pleased to make her rent so cheaply, as she considered it, for she had become interested in little Agnes, who, as well as the other children, always showed a decided liking for her ; and she now wished for some distraction to the mind, for while her fingers were so busily employed all day, her poor aching heart would wander, and act over and over again the brief episode of love and joy which had flashed into her life, only to make its after-desolation more dark and dreary.

The general public of the workroom little thought what weary metaphysics of feeling revolved behind that pale brow, and lent such dreamy tenderness to the large, soft eyes, which yet were always kind.

Unconsciously the gentle, uncomplaining girl won a certain respect, perhaps unconsciously given. But in her new task of instruction, Marie found some relief, even though partly caused by vexation.

With much difficulty, she collected a few old French books, but the Herculean task of getting the children together, of preserving the quiet necessary for instruction in the general sitting-room, of suppressing the long harangues of Mrs.

Bushel, meant to enforce order and attention, almost exceeded her powers at first. Gradually, she acquired a little habitual authority, however, and, as Mrs. Bushel about this time, with much exultation, accepted the post of district visitor, for which she informed Marie, her worthy pastor, the Rev. Josiah Gumbleton, considered her especially fitted, the evenings, which she generally devoted to distributing weak tracts to strong men and preaching looseness to the world, to their poor draggle-tailed wives, whose highest conception of existence was meat every day, and a new dress for Sundays, were less disturbed; and at the end of a week Marie began to hope that by and by she might possibly see her little riotous pupils attentive and improving.

A few days after this hope began to dawn. Mrs. Bushel was unusually late in her return. Marie remained on with the children, for Jemima, seeing her mistress had left no particular orders about anything, concluded there was no necessity for her to remain at home. And the seedy papa, finding no supper or society, had rummaged out a "screw" of tobacco, and gone to see what news was stirring in the Mechanics' Institution.

Mrs. Bushel's ring was speedily followed by her appearance, bearing a pleased and somewhat preoccupied expression.

“ Well, it’s half-past nine, I do declare. I’m sure, mademoiselle, I am greatly obliged to you for staying on with these troublesome children. What a good-for-nothing girl that Jemima is to go off, and me out ! I declare servants are a bad set, and if you change, you must go from bad to worse, or I would pack her off to-morrow. But, you see, our good Pastor asked me, when I met him there in Little Philpot Lane—and oh ! dear, there’s an old laundress there that is just the most wonderful example of grace you ever heard of. She was frequently intoxicated, and used the most ‘orrid language ; but since I took up the district, she has been very poorly, and read three tracts—‘Where are you going?’ ‘What are you doing?’ and ‘Stop!’ It’s a *serious* of tracts most striking, and now she only takes tea and mutton broth, and says she’s a brand plucked from the burning, poor thing ! She has a dreadful red face, certainly—and ! what was I saying?—oh ! yes, I met the Rev. Mr. Gumbleton at the end of her lane. He just asked me to step in to a committee of ladies (I forgot to say the doctor has ordered her three glasses of gin a day, to keep up the system, so *that*, you know, helps to make her face red). Well, a committee of ladies about this treat to the Ragged School next Wednesday—and really, when he is so good as to consider my opinion of conse-

quence, I do not not like to refuse" (with an air of modest consequence); "so I went, and we settled it all beautiful. They are to have tea and buns, and several eminent gentlemen will address the meeting; each lady is to provide and pour out tea, and buns, for twenty children—they are each to have two penny buns, that's—let me see—twice one-and-eightpence three-and-fourpence; and I suppose it will take a quarter of tea—eh, mademoiselle? It ought'ned to be too strong, you know, for children."

"I'll help to pour out the tea. Oh, do let me. And do let me have a new hat, my hat's shocking bad."

"Yes"—"And me!"—"And me!" chorused the others.

"Oh; don't tease, my dears!" returned Mrs. Bushel. "You must come, too, mademoiselle. It will be quite a treat, elegant speaking, and a good work, too,—elevating to the soul—if you can get away in time."

"I thank you," said Marie, vaguely. "I suppose we shall have the same clergyman who preached at your chapel the first Sunday I was there."

"O yes! You mean Mr. Probemwell. I think he'll be sure to speak, and he is most improving. Well I hope you had good girls to-night!"

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN the important Wednesday arrived, Marie felt idly inclined to accompany her landlady—she felt a sort of refuge too, poor girl, in topics which described the rest, the joy, the love of another life—she had not naturally much of that morbid, religious feeling, which some excellent persons prize as a high tone of spirituality; and though fondly and earnestly looking to a future life, was more disposed to find religion in the performance of present duties, than in vague speculations as to future reward and punishment. But now! weighed as she had been in the balance of worldly estimation, and found so terribly wanting, where could she turn for sympathy, save to that Great Reader of the human heart, who alone can measure its strength and weakness, and alone can judge how much of pure ore and base alloy enters into its actuating motives, when its efforts seem noblest, or its abasement deepest?

Religious addresses, sermons, prayers, were a relief to Marie in her present state of mind; and, at all events, some tendency she could not quite

account for, had she tried, inclined her to accompany her energetic hostess to the meeting.

By taking an omnibus she contrived to reach 25 Tivoli Gardens, Mrs. Bushel's residence, in tolerable time, and found the household in an uproar.

"What do you think, my dear? there's that tiresome Tucker and Mr. Grainger—of all days in the year—they have brought a young friend home to tea, and a rump-steak, and, of course, how could I attend to it—what with putting up the tea and sugar, and getting the children ready—and that girl Jemima is so vexed, because she made sure of going out, that she's gone and burnt it to a cinder—not that she can cook much at the best of times—but she *can* do a steak—and Tucker has been swearing awful. I think I had better send him a tract. But come what will, I can't disappoint Mr. Gumbleton, when he counts upon me."

After some further scrambling and hurrying, the party got under weigh—Marie leading little Agnes.

The tea-meeting was held in the schoolroom of the chapel where Marie had first met the Bushel family, and was crowded to overflowing when they entered, and hot and unpleasant to no slight degree.

At the upper end was a sort of temporary

dais or stage, which, at the commencement of the proceedings, contained only empty chairs.

"This way, mum," said one of the chapel pew-openers to Mrs. Bushel, as panting and heated, her arm aching with the weight it sustained in the shape of a huge basket of buns, etc., fussed into the crowd, and with her party she was ushered to an important and prominent table at the upper end of the room, near the platform, a tribute to her worth and gentility, which greatly delighted the excellent matron; her broad face beamed with satisfaction, as it also shone from other causes, as she took her place and gathered her flock around her.

"Sit opposite to me, my dear," she said to Marie, "and you will see beautiful!—and there's nothing like seeing, as well as hearing. Augusta Jane, go, there's a good girl, and see if you can get some hot water—boiling, mind! Goodness, but it's hot! I wish some one would open that window!"

"They can't, mar, don't you see it's a wentilator?"

"Dear, dear! that child sees everything!" cried the mother, with admiration.

But her distinguished position quickly told upon the exhausted and panting Mrs. Bushel. Cup after cup was poured out and replenished, till she was fain to give the post of honor to Marie, whose complexion fortunately tended to

grow pale instead of red, under the effect of heat or excitement.

So the feast proceeded, the piles of buns disappeared, the last waterings of the teapots were exhausted, and the poor little guests began to pinch and tease each other for want of better amusement.

Suddenly there was a lull.

The Reverend, and other gentlemen, about to address the meeting, began to assemble, climbing up two or three rude steps which led to the platform—stiffly, easily, lightly or puffingly, as the case might be.

There was the Rev. Mr. Tompkins, the minister of the Lambeth Circus Branch Chapel, and the Rev. Josias Pitcher, the Congregational minister, and the Wesleyan clergyman, and, as Mrs. Bushel enthusiastically exclaimed, "Our own dear Pastor!" some of the deacons, and a tall, bony, iron-grey man, greatly at variance in style, dress, and look from his companions—he had a rugged aspect, with deep-set, grave eyes, and a close-shut, wide, firm mouth, and heavy jaw; his clothes, of uniform, dark color, were well made, his boots, his hat, his gloves, had an air of freshness, and though as unfashionable as any of the rest, he was emphatically a gentleman, and evidently a man of substance and position; yet he looked hard, and cold, and dry, and as opposed as possible to the unctuous, self-con-

tented air of his coadjutors ; he took his place rather in the background, and seemed to decline the polite, nay, deferential nods and becks of his companions, when they strove to make him take a foremost place.

Marie gazed upon him fascinated and alarmed—it was her companion in that wretched journey from Dover, every moment, every incident of which was stereotyped on her brain—forever and forever!!

But an old clergyman now rose and uttered the words, "Let us ask a blessing," whereupon every one present, more or less, assumed an attitude of prayer.

This passed and all reassumed their previous positions, without affording to Marie any opportunity to shrink out of sight. She felt an instinctive dread of her fellow-traveller—a certainty that could he know her true history he would condemn her utterly. He looked as though he was always ready to lay down comfort and happiness and geniality, on the shrine of duty, uncompromisingly himself, and that this native power on his side, gave him an undoubted right to expect similar strength from his fellow-laborers in life's rough field. If not, you were a cast-away, and it seemed to Marie that nothing could be hidden from those cold, penetrating grey eyes, and that nothing could save her from the verdict of those close-shut thin lips, so she sat

very uncomfortably hearing, without listening, to a long harangue about ragged schools in general, and the Lambeth institutions, the work progressing in the "Lord's vineyard," etc., interspersed largely with anecdotes of wonderful little boys and girls who all died at an early period of life.

The color came and went in her cheek—she kept her eyes fixed on the ground, fearful of meeting those of the iron-gray man, yet, ever nervously anxious to know if he was looking at her, she could not resist stealing upward glances every few minutes to see if she was observed. For some time he did not seem to see her or any one, but to be lost in attention or thought; at length after a round of applause which followed the Rev. speaker's description of the successful career of a ragged schoolboy, Marie once more took a furtive glance, and to her dismay, met her former companion's keen eyes bent upon her with an expression of surprise and doubt, yet unmingled with severity, and not untinged with pleasure.

It was a look which said, unconsciously, "Do I at last see her who has been so much in my thoughts?"

Marie vaguely gave herself up as lost, that is—committed in some inexplicable manner to some severe course of duty, self-denial and mortification!

The remainder of the speech was a mist to her, she heard dimly, at intervals, well-known quotations and allusions to spiritual influences, and to the damnable doctrines of Rome, but all was swallowed up in the horror of detection, the dread of she knew not what! Being driven back to Guy perhaps, albeit reluctantly received and leading a life of constant duty-doing and heart-breaking! Yes—her ex-companion looked capable of exacting more than a “pound of flesh”—even of distilling the tears of weak hearts into the bitterness of enforced endurance, and he seemed a man of power too!

Fearing and thinking thus, the eloquence of the varied exhortations fell dimly on Marie's ear; at last her iron-gray friend rose, and her attention immediately woke up to its utmost. His tone and manner were very unlike his precursors, extremely dry—yet clear; without an unnecessary word he laid before his hearers the inestimable benefit of education—and dwelt, with more force than perhaps was quite suitable to the character of the meeting, on the worldly advantages arising from good habits, good principles, good training; then he turned to higher motives, but here, though evidently much in earnest he was less at home, stammered slightly and was embarrassed. His Deity—was a God of vengeance and an uncompromising taskmaster, whom 'twere best to propitiate in time, and

whose relations even to the best-conducted of ragged school-boys, were of a doubtful nature, so invariably is each man's God a reflex of himself.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE speech was listened to with profound attention, but not loudly applauded. Though *dour* in tone, it was yet bracing, and, moreover, the very voice and accent, the mode of speech, the nameless refinement, despite its unadorned plainness, gave the speaker all that wondrous effect which is ever produced by one we feel to be undoubtedly superior, not only in mind and attainments, but also in social position. This peroration accomplished, and the atmosphere having risen almost to boiling point, in spite of the cooling influence of the last speaker, there was a whispered consultation among the gentlemen on the platform, and a fat, oily man, in a limp, white tie, rose and said—

“De—ear friends, let us return thanks for the refreshment that has been granted unto ‘us”—he meant the speeches, not the buns—and then the whole congregation rose, and adopted devotional attitudes.

There was a long wrestling in prayer; but all was at last ended, the children scuffled out, and Marie eagerly tied on the little girls’ hats as a hint to their mother that it was time to

"move on." But the hint was not taken. The flattered, fevered, panting Mrs. Bushel was anxious to crown the evening's glories by remaining for special notice from some or all of the Reverend gentlemen who had addressed the meeting.

They had now descended from the platform, and, with the humility which marks great minds, mingled with the throng of teachers, tea-makers, and district-visitors, who gradually crowded together as the small guests of the evening departed, eager for notice and commendation.

Marie was hemmed in, and felt much as the wretched prisoner in the "Iron shroud" must have done, as the human walls closed around her.

At last the Rev. Mr. Gumbleton, "our own dear Pastor," came up, and by his side Marie's gray "Phantom of sadness." It was all over; she must face and acknowledge him.

"This, sir," said Mr. Gumbleton, as though in continuation of something—"is one of our most active and persevering district visitors"—waving his hand towards the delighted Mrs. Bushel.

"Within the last month, this good lady has distributed not less than 167 tracts, of the most stirring description, and circulated 48 New Testaments; but four days ago she discovered a

pernicious publication, entitled 'Hints for Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Mary,' concealed in two of your cottages in Mortimer Terrace, Pelham Park, where we had hoped the good work was prospering. The emissaries of Rome, sir, are unwearied in evil, watchful to lay wait."

"I am happy to make your acquaintance," said the iron-gray man, with cold politeness; "such energy is its own reward. But I am concerned to hear that our Romish adversaries have invaded a district so carefully tended as Pelham Park."

Mrs. Bushel smiled, and curtsied, and fluttered out a confused answer, in which "our worthy Pastor's encouraging notice," and "your kind approbation, sir," were jumbled up with her "own poor efforts and undeserved success."

But all this time Marie felt rather than knew the keen, dark, gray eye, which had yet something mysteriously familiar in its severity, was fixed upon her.

Mr. Gumbleton then began some undertoned and earnest conversation with Mrs. Bushel; and then Marie's ex-companion approaching a step nearer, said, in cold, composed tones, as though their meeting was the most natural and commonplace thing in the world—

"I am glad to find you engaged in so good a work. May I hope you have prospered since

we met, and obtained a situation of the nature you required?"

Marie raised her large, sad eyes beseechingly towards him, and his softened as they met her glance. A more experienced or designing woman might have surmised that fire could be struck even from so flinty a personage, had she seen the expression. But poor Marie heeded not.

"You are very kind to remember me," she replied, in her low, sweet tones. "These little girls are my pupils;" then, half-ashamed of the partial evasion, added with a smile—"and in the mornings I work in a large millinery establishment."

"That can scarce be a profitable employment for body or soul," returned her interrogator, with a shade of additional coldness.

"It suits me," replied Marie, in unaffected humility.

There was a pause—and still the iron-gray man lingered beside her. "You did not, then, find it necessary to use the address I gave you? You have probably found other friends," he resumed.

"Friends!" responded Marie, the tears starting to her eyes. "Alas! I have none—but God has helped me, and though I did not avail myself of it—I have kept your writing in gratitude for your kindness to a total stranger;" and again

she looked up to him with a glance so speaking that he involuntarily responded to it.

"Where are you living at present?" he asked, after another rather uneasy pause.

"With this," she hesitated—"this lady," indicating Mrs. Bushel—who, having finished her confidential communications with Mr. Gumbleton, now stood at "attention," rather astonished to find an acquaintanceship existed between her humble inmate and the lordly patron of Pelham Park Institution.

"That is well," said that gentleman with more cordiality than he had yet spoken. "I am now somewhat pressed for time, but I should be glad to assist you to some situation more suitable to your seeming position than daily work in a milliner's establishment. I am generally to be found on alternate Saturday and Wednesday afternoons at the 'Youths' Institute;' if Mrs. Bushel would kindly accompany you thither," he added, with a vague sense of guarding against something. "Meantime, permit me to take your address;" and he again produced the pocket-book and massive silver pencil Marie so well remembered.

"Oh dear! to be sure," said Mrs. Bushel, highly pleased, "No. 25, Tivoli Gardens—not twenty minutes' walk from your Institution, sir—an 'umble, but, I trust, genteel abode of contentment and love."

He bowed stiffly.

"Let me hope I was enabled to speak a word in season when I saw you in such deep sorrow?" he said, in a low tone. "And suffer me to suggest that candor is the surest means to secure friendship."

He bowed again.

"You are very kind," murmured Marie, indistinctly, as he moved away. "Ah! he is good," she thought—"but terrible—he will tear my secret from me some day."

"Law! my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Bushel, when they were outside the school-room, "however did you know Mr. Watson?"

"Watson! yes, that was the name he wrote. Who is Mr. Watson?"

"Oh! a very rich, high gentleman indeed! he lives in Belgrave Square or some such place—in a palace of a house, Mr. Gumbleton was telling me—and knows Lord Shaftesbury, and Dr. Cumming, and lots of lords and ladies—and yet he is always doing good and mixing himself up with all sorts of humble, not to say low, people. He bought all this property about here, Pelham Park, and that just to do good to the poor, though I *have* heard it's a wonderful improving property—wonderful. You see—'A little that the righteous hath is better than'—no, that's not quite it," breaking off. "But how did you know him, mademoiselle dear?"

‘Oh, accidentally. I travelled in the same railway carriage, and was not very—very well, and he was most kind.’

‘Oh! I daresay, and he’s quite the gentleman—quite. Augusta Jane, don’t be scuffling your feet in the dust, it’s most unladylike! dear, dear. Well, it was very gratifying, but rather warm, and I must say I’d be the better of a good glass of porter!’

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And Mr. Watson hailed the first “Hansom” he could find. He lay back and strove to think of the progress of education and godliness among his poorer brethren; of the routine of to-morrow’s business; of the investment which offered yesterday for certain loose thousands; of that opening to trade and religion (we beg pardon), religion and trade on the West Coast of Africa—but all these trains of thought were broken and rendered futile by the light of those sweet, sad eyes which still seemed to look into his, and draw forth his very soul despite himself; the echo of that gentle voice, the murmured music of her soft “You are very kind!” The iron-gray man almost started to find how they haunted him, and with fierce resolve he tore his mind away savagely, turning from the tenderness which involuntarily stole over him, as the image so repeatedly banished rose up again and again.

He was a lonely man—why, none could tell, not even himself, for he had always possessed wealth, and had also “been lord of himself,” for many a year, but business, or coldness, or religion or something, had always preoccupied and saved him from the wiles even of the most charming and diligent district visitors, bazaar furnishers and tract distributors; and now, at his mature age and advanced Christianity, was he to be haunted by the nameless charm, the tender grace, of an insignificant milliner’s apprentice, a creature he had picked up in a railway carriage, of unknown and doubtful antecedents and very uncertain religious views,—forbid it respectability, prudence, common sense! It was but an unusual amount of pity for an uncommon case.

“She is a gentlewoman, evidently; perhaps the orphan of some improvident parents; possibly the victim of some—”

Pah! how his soul revolted as the chance of a not unheard-of reason for evading friends and inquiries glanced across his mind. His spare, bony hand involuntarily clenched, and tendencies very much opposed to Gospel injunction braced his muscles for a moment.

“As a Christian it is my duty to rescue her in some way;” but why should he feel so deep an interest?

“Curious fool, be still!

Is human love the growth of human will?”

CHAPTER XXIV.

IT was several days before Marie could recover the strange species of terror and excitement which Mr. Watson's recognition had caused her. Why should she fear this man, who, with all his grave respectability and measured coldness, was yet evidently anxious to befriend her? She could not explain her own feelings; reason as she would, they always returned. She did not want help; she wanted merely to go on earning obscurely what was sufficient to pay her humble way, not to be cross-examined and tortured and humiliated!

The Bushel household had recovered the excitement of the "tea-meeting," the justly-incensed "drawing-rooms" had forgiven his burnt steak, and matters had subsided to their usual level—when one evening, as Marie was endeavoring to impress the intricacies of a piece of vocabulary on her little favorite "Agnes," down in the front-kitchen, dignified in the establishment as the breakfast-parlor, a ring claimed immediate attention from its tone of decision. A hasty rush to the front door—a trampling of several pairs of boots—and then Mrs. Bushel

descended like an avalanche on the French class—with a radiant face.

"Goodness gracious, my dear, come up directly; here's our dear good Pastor and Mr. Watson himself, and they want to see you."

"To see me? Oh! what can they want with me, Mrs. Bushel?" cried poor Marie, shrinking and turning pale.

"Don't delay now. You'll soon hear, I've no doubt, and you look quite neat—come along, do."

Mrs. Bushel almost propelled her young friend upstairs before her.

The front parlor, always of narrow dimensions, looked smaller than ever, as Marie entered it, and confronted the "good Pastor," whose goodly breadth was dominated by the superior height of Mr. Watson, who, though spare, was a large-boned, broad-shouldered man. He stood on the hearth-rug—his hat held behind him, looking keen, cool, iron-gray as usual; and Marie would have given the wealth of worlds could she have commanded it, poor child, to escape his eager, questioning glance.

The source of its power she little knew, the strange hunger it expressed to gather up the secrets of her soul; so she stood irresolute—her color changing—her unconsciously-appealing, shrinking look, which stirred the stern philanthropist so deeply—contending with the air of composure she struggled hard to preserve.

Mr. Watson bowed as she entered, and moved a chair forward with grave politeness, involuntarily treating the object of his would-be patronage as an equal.

Mr. Gumbleton put out a fat, warm hand, with ostentatious condescension—"Very glad, my young friend, to be the means of forwarding our respected benefactor's views in your favor. He will explain them to you himself."

"I am sure the Lord has been very good to her," panted Mrs. Bushel, "to see the kind interest you good gentlemen—"

"The proposition I wish to make is this," interrupted Mr. Watson, with surprised impatience: "I have nearly organized a new Institution for the training of female children of a class above the attendants of Ragged Schools, whose parents are willing to pay a small sum weekly. I have already an excellent Matron, but I should wish a somewhat higher class of teacher—one calculated to influence the children—and this situation I offer to you, with a salary of fifty pounds—if you conscientiously consider yourself equal to fulfil it. I want a little better instruction than what is ordinarily bestowed in Charity Schools, with the intention of giving those who wish to elevate themselves a chance of doing so; and this, I imagine, you would be capable of imparting—while it would

be more suited to and profitable for you than your present occupation."

"I scarcely know how to answer you," returned Marie, sorely embarrassed. "Your great kindness in thus searching out a poor stranger to bestow unasked benefits—is—is—more than I can express. But, oh! sir, I am, indeed, unequal to such an undertaking. I am weak, and my nerves so treacherous. No! Let me stay quietly at my 'needlework.' I shall earn my living by that—and—"

"Law, my dear! How do you know but they'll turn you off when the dull season comes? You know you are only an extra, and may be dismissed any morning. Now don't fly in the face of Providence," cried Mrs. Bushel.

"If our respected friend judges you to be worthy the calling, you should rest content, young woman," said the Rev. Mr. Gumbleton, in a tone of rebuke.

"No," replied Marie, with gentle firmness. "He calls upon *me* to judge myself, and I fear, in truth, I should not fulfil his expectations. I am not equal to much now," she added, in a lower tone.

There was a pause. Mr. Watson looked down silently, as in thought; then addressing Mrs. Bushel, said, a shade more coldly,

"I should wish to speak with this young person alone."

"O yes, certainly, sir. If you'll just come upstairs, Mr. Gumbleton" (the drawing-rooms is out), "I will show you the report of the Philpot Dorcas Society;" and Mrs. Bushel led the way, with her *staccato* movement, so suddenly, that Mr. Gumbleton felt compelled to follow very rapidly.

"Sit down," said Mr. Watson; and laying aside his hat, and something of his cold composure, drew a chair to the opposite side of the table, and Marie obeyed, in a sort of helpless despair, yet resolved to defend her secret to the last. Her heart beat, and the little hand she unconsciously pressed to her brow, trembled visibly.

There was a moment's silence; the grave Elder's heart beat also. What charm was there in the mingled strength and weakness of this poor young stranger that moved him so powerfully, though he did not—dared not—acknowledge it? He could have clasped her to his heart as a friendless child, to be cherished and protected. He adoringly worshipped the gentle strength which dominated, yet submitted to him.

"You must feel I am your friend," he began, in quiet tones, which had a ring of kindness in them; "why, then, will you not allow me to assist you, and confide in me? Permit me to say that a young and friendless creature like

yourself should not throw away a friend because of *some* self-opinionated scruple about revealing your past history. We are all liable to error, and a confession of past shortcomings will not lessen my desire to set you right in the future. Your natural position is evidently superior to your present state; but, humble as the calling of teacher in the class I suggest is, it is more worthy of you than your present occupation. Why do you shrink from it? You are more than equal, I feel assured, to the task. There is some hidden reason, and I desire to know it; or, I must come to some conclusion detrimental to the good opinion I would fain form of your character."

And he looked into Marie's eyes with a keen, steadfast gaze, as though he defied their dark, lustrous depths to hide any secret from him.

"I will speak all truth to you, so far as I dare," returned Marie, with parched lips, and pressing her clasped hands tightly together. "I do not accept your offer, because grief has unhinged and unfitted me for it. I am unequal to control even myself, but principally because I have a secret which I will *not* reveal—not if the keeping of it cost me life; and I fear you—I fear your kindness, your sternness, your influence; good as you are, friend though you be, I would rather never see you again than tell you my secret, for it is not all mine. And have I

not a right to a secret?" she continued, rising from her seat, and speaking with a little excitement. "You are a great and a good gentleman, but we all—men and women—have a right to the sanctity of our own memories, as well as to the bread we can win! Ah! sir, I love and respect you, and would give much to win your esteem in the path you have pointed out to me; but there is only way I can undertake it. Trust me! I have done nothing wrong! I have been true to those with whom I have had to do—true to myself. If you will let my life begin from [the present, and trust my own word for the past, I will obey you, and confide as a child to a parent; but you must believe me—I have done nothing wrong—nothing!"

She stopped abruptly. Mr. Watson frowned ominously; his sallow cheek grew a shade paler, and the hand that rested on the table twitched; but he spoke calmly, when after a few moments' thought he said—

"I may be unwise, Miss Thibaut" (he had never called her by her name before), "but I *will* trust and try you; hereafter, perhaps—but the future will shape itself. Remember, however, you have yet to win my full approbation. For the present I engage you, as I should any other young woman with satisfactory references, and no one has a right to question you when I am satisfied."

"O yes, yes!" cried Marie, impulsively catching and pressing his hand.

As she did so, she met his eyes, and in their troubled expression there was a nameless something that, strange as it seemed, recalled Guy—Guy in his fondest moods—so vividly, that the great tears welled over, and she rushed from the room sobbing as though her heart would break.

Mr. Watson stood for a moment as she had left him, passed his hand once or twice across his brow, then collecting himself, rang the bell.

"I have partly overcome Miss Thibaut's scruples," he said to Mr. Gumbleton, as Mrs. Bushel and that gentleman entered; "and I will give her a day or two to think the matter over—at present, I am somewhat pressed for time. Mr. Gumbleton will see her again, and explain the subject more fully."

He bowed to Mrs. Bushel, and departed, carrying the Pastor with him.

CHAPTER XXV.

“WELL, indeed, my dear; I never knew such luck,” said Mrs. Bushel, seating herself with a flop on the side of Marie’s little bed, “and you crying instead of rejoicing. Come, come, it is right down flying in the face of Providence not to be joyful over such a lift; and that hard work was killing you my dear—killing you by inches! Mr. Gumbleton has been telling me that it is thirty pounds a year, and a room to yourself.”

Marie, taking her hand, said,—

“Do not mind my tears, I am very thankful in spite of them; but—but I was obliged to speak to Mr. Watson on some painful topics, and felt overcome.”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Bushel, curious, yet satisfied, as she interpreted Marie’s innocently ambiguous phrase into a full confession of her previous history to Mr. Watson, and his approval thereof. “Well, my dear, I’m sure you couldn’t do no better than tell that kind, good gentleman everything: but at the same time, where one has the feelings of a mother towards

you, and no inclination to gossip or talk, but the reverse, confidence would not be misplaced, not that I have any desire to pry," etc.

At last Mrs. Bushel wore out her conjectures and expended her time. She parted affectionately from her mysterious inmate, too genial in nature to be soured, even by curiosity unsatisfied and confidence withheld.

Marie thought long and deeply.

She did not question her own discretion in accepting Mr. Watson's offer. She felt she was powerless in the matter; and though he had generously consented to respect her secret, she knew instinctively it was but a postponement of the evil day.

There was that in the "iron-gray man" which would rend it from her sooner or later;—a strange sympathy seemed to exist between them, coupled on her side with dread, which yet did not diminish her liking and respect for him. There was gold fused with the rugged quartz of his nature.

And how did it stand? that account with the unknown future she shunned to reckon up. Her daily bread was provided while health was left her. She was respectably sheltered, and in the employment of one who would not leave a profitable servant to starve or die in the work-house when unable to work; so far, all was better than she could have dared to hope on that

terrible day when she fled from Guy and love and hope.

Nevertheless she sat motionless, gazing at vacancy, paralyzed with a despair of life, which no human eloquence could express.

It was as if some bloodless ghost was left to her—some pale shadow of existence without color or flavor or vitality; and must she submit to this! Never—never more seek out her husband, her love! Oh, to see him once more! to hear his voice, even if it said Farewell! Yet would not this deadly silence be better than to find herself still rejected and viewed as an impostor—a clog—something to be rid of?

If she kept away out of sight might he not regret her! So she must endure to the end, and strive and do her best; but nature's voice whispered that this state of things could not last. Youth is so strong, the heart so elastic, that it must throw off the weight which oppresses it or perish. The future always terrified her—she knew not why.

“God help me!—God guide me!” she ejaculated, as she rose to busy herself with some necessary needlework, to chase these terrible thoughts away.

In less than a week all things were arranged, and Marie moved her few belongings to the neat little chamber assigned to her in the new wing

of Pelham Park Institution, where Mr. Watson had organized his school.

The matron was a somewhat stern, silent, but inoffensive woman, nevertheless disposed in a quiet way to treat Marie as a dependant; this, however, gave the former little annoyance.

Marie took her meals with the matron in a sitting-room allotted to their joint use; but always, on three evenings in the week, walked over to Mrs. Bushel's to give a French lesson gratis to her little pupils in Tivoli Gardens.

The school being in its infancy she did not find it so overwhelming a task as she at first expected, and the number gradually increasing, she found her strength grow to it.

The severe matron assisted her considerably, both in school hours by maintaining discipline, and out of them by the practical suggestions of experience.

So time wore on. Mr. Watson occasionally called, generally on a Saturday, and appeared satisfied with the working of his plan.

Marie's dread of him had considerably subsided; no approach had been made to the forbidden subject; and though cold and guarded enough in speech, there was a tender and wistful expression in his eyes, to which Marie's heart unconsciously warmed.

As for him, a graver and a sterner man might well feel his pulses quicken to see that pale, sad

face, and its downcast eyes brighten and revive, when they met his glance, and then only. Oh, wondrous magnetism of feeling! no bond can ever bind, no chain enslave, like the consciousness that some other feeble struggling heart out of its dim groping for life, which is love, calls upon yours, and says, "Come, be mine."

And the dry, practical man, for whom the spring-time of life had been but a talent hidden in a napkin, was waking to the magnetism of this appeal. The glow and warmth of the subtle master was coming to his soul with the enhanced glory of an Indian summer!

To the respectable Mr. Watson, "behold all things were becoming new!" The severity which made "duty" an unrelaxing "Jugger-naut" was now tinged with a vague indulgence, partaking of the "love which forgiveth and hopeth all things," and the inflexible justice of the Deity less present to his imagination than the boundless mercy set forth by Him who alone knoweth the Father.

"And you find the system of reward, rather than punishment, on the whole successful?"

He was conversing alone with Marie, after she had been some time established in her new employment.

"Certainly; and I have great faith in it. I have always found there is no chance for a naughty child until you have accorded total and

complete forgiveness and oblivion; then they have some ground to stand upon and begin a new career, as you, dear, kind sir, have permitted me; though, remember, I do not admit I was a naughty child!"

And she looked in his face with eyes so expressive of tender gratitude and a tinge of her old, soft archness, that a strange, electric yearning quivered through his heart, and made it beat high and strong for a moment.

"Dear child," he returned, subduing himself to grave kindness, "I have long ceased to doubt you, though I hope and believe the day will come, and that soon, when you will trust me, even as much as I have trusted you. I begin to see, young friend, that despite the safeguard of religious faith, a life passed among hardening influences — men, money, business — has deadened me too much to the softer maxims of our great Teacher. But I can atone—I can atone," he murmured to himself, and then paused abruptly.

Neither Marie nor her benefactor had observed the confidential tone which had gradually colored their communications; and she felt no surprise when he said,

"Had I a relative—a daughter like yourself—the intercourse with a fresh, young mind would have done much to keep me freer from coldness and self."

"You cold or selfish!" cried Marie, indignantly. "You, the kindest and truest!"

"Hush!" returned Mr. Watson, rising to walk to and fro. "I am not sure how far my kindness may not be selfish, but I have distant glimpses of more than I deserve—yet it is premature to speak—I may advise your removal."

Marie was a good deal puzzled at these disjointed sentences. "There is scarcely any suggestion of yours I would not accept," she said, softly. "You are my best and only friend—I have the greatest faith in your wisdom."

"That is more than I have myself," he returned, with a grim smile. "I am just now discovering depths of weakness and perhaps indiscretion in my own character which I did not believe existed. And yet," he added as if to himself, "my folly may prove wisdom."

"I do not think you could ever have been foolish, even when you were young," cried Marie, warmly; "and if you have been, as you say, indiscreet in any way, I am sure it has done you good; you look so much brighter and better."

"Do I?" he said thoughtfully; "no doubt," he continued, after an instant's pause, "I seem a patriarch to you!"

"A heart like yours is never old," replied Marie, not noticing the earnest, searching glance he cast upon her.

"If," resumed Mr. Watson, "I am thus deserving of all confidence, Miss Thibaut, why do you not give it to me? I am desirous of making your future my special care, but it is essential that I be thoroughly acquainted with your past life, Marie, before I lay before you a plan—a project—which—" He hesitated, and broke off abruptly.

Marie turned pale even to her lips. "I feel I ought to tell you everything," she said, clasping her hands tightly—"and I will—but not now! Give me a little longer time, till I am stronger and calmer, and my terrible wounds are somewhat healed, then you shall know all, and I will abide by what you ordain, even though you send me away."

"Child," he returned, looking strangely, wistfully at her, "you cannot have done much wrong—nevertheless, I dread to hear your confession—dread it unspeakably," again he paced to and fro. "God grant," he was recommencing, when the matron entered, and the conversation turned upon some details of school management, in discussing which Marie observed Mr. Watson was rather absent; at length he looked at his watch:

"I have overstayed my time," he said; "but, Miss Thibaut, you can deliver a message to your friend Mrs. Bushel—tell her to send her husband to me to-morrow before ten—there is my private address—I think I have found a clerkship for

which he is suited. You continue to teach her children? You are grateful! you would do much for gratitude?" he asked.

Marie, wondering at his unusual tone and manner, replied in the affirmative, and he left the room, followed by the obsequious matron.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

NEARLY two months had passed since Neville's fruitless visit to the benevolent Mrs. Jupp. The revulsion of feeling it had caused him, coming after so much and such long-continued excitement, had laid him prostrate with a severe and lowering fever, which his medical attendant assured him imperatively demanded repose—"physical repose at any rate," he added, on Neville's exclaiming that there could be no rest for him. "You will utterly unfit yourself for the search you are so bent upon if you do not take some weeks' complete rest." But even then Neville's usually powerful frame was but ill able to second his eager desire to be "up and doing."

However, the opening of the present chapter finds him in Paris, whither he had gone in the vague hope of discovering some trace of Marie's aunt, who had never taken any notice of his long explanatory letter, or otherwise communicated with him.

Thither he was accompanied by his stanch friend Sir Frederic Compton, who purposed proceeding to Switzerland and the North of

Italy, having got a couple of months' leave. But Neville could not as yet look further forward than another week. To settle plans or projects seemed utterly impossible, when he lived in the nervous anticipation that each morning and evening would bring some conclusive tidings of his lost one.

Paris was hot and full of visitors when the young men reached it—and poor Neville terribly exhausted by his journey, albeit taken in easy stages. He strove in vain to shake off the languor which hung round him like some charmed garment, rendering every effort a labor; and despite his eagerness he found it impossible to leave his room, or face the roar and rush of the streets, till a couple of days' complete rest had somewhat restored him. Then—the total change of scene and air produced a reviving effect; and on the third morning after their arrival the friends sallied forth to the Rue St. Lazare, to the address given them by Miss Redoubt.

It was a mean entrance, and the *concierge* had a small den on the top of the first flight, where a half-glass door enabled inquirers to see him constantly bending over some dilapidated boot or shoe, for his *métier* was the useful though humble calling of a cobbler. To him our friends addressed themselves, and he replied with vivacity and intelligence so unlike the profound, yet not ill-meant, indifference with which a Saxon

says he knows nothing about the subject of your inquiries, and then relapses into silence.

Monsieur le concierge evidently knew nothing either, nevertheless he had a great deal to say about it: "Madame Rouviac—*mais non*—yet hold—there was an old lady, *au quatrième*, nearly blind, who took much snuff—might she not be the lady they sought? Her name was Grenier—it's true, still an old lady—but hold, how long was it since the old lady sought by Monsieur resided in *Numéro vingt-sept*?"

"Two or three months back."

"My faith, all the world is upset since three months—look now—the proprietor dies—all things are sold—the present proprietor, *Monsieur le concierge* himself, and various *locataires*, have all been settled in No. 27 since; for the others!"—a pause, and the *concierge* extends his fingers like a fan, with a sudden movement indicative of the scattering abroad of the former inmates.

"Then you know nothing of Madame Rouviac?"

But no! He knew nothing. *Là bas*—perhaps—the *charbonnier*—could perhaps inform them. He had been there many years.

"*Là bas*" was the entrance of the passage to the right of which was a wood-store.

The proprietor was out, but Madame was visible. Now Madame is generally in France more than equal to Monsieur, and Madame had

much information to give, only unfortunately it was not very relevant. She remembered Madame Rouviac very well: an old lady, an irate personage, according to general report, but most amiable to Madame *la charbonnière*; because, you see, she loved her much. She thought, but was not quite sure, that the old lady had gone to live with a cousin or a nephew, who had great affection for the old lady, because, you see, she was secret with her affairs; but they say she has wherewithal in the *Fonds Publiques*. Madame *la charbonnière* knew nothing, certainly, but—

“Can you give us any clue to her present abode? Did she leave no address for the *facteur*? How were her letters forwarded?”

“Letters! *Ma foi!* The old lady never received letters. But hold! I recall a morning, seven or eight weeks back, when there was a demand for Madame Rouviac, and I was asked—knowing the affection of that amiable lady for me—for her address; but no one knew it. It was the *facteur* who asked, but I can tell no more.”

“It must have been my letter, in all probability,” said Neville to Compton. “It is about that time I wrote. Pardon the trouble I have caused you,” he added, raising his hat to Madame *la charbonnière*, who volubly assured them it was a pleasure to converse with two gentlemen so polite and distinguished.

They turned away.

"I shall lose no time in applying to the police," said Neville, putting his arm through that of Compton; "they will soon discover this old lady. Is it not curious how every clue fails? Is it fate? By Heavens! Fred, I am so changed; I shall turn a drivelling fatalist next! Call a *fiacre*, I feel shaky still."

There was such deep despondency in his tones that his companion's kind heart felt a pang of the warmest sympathy, and he silently resolved to postpone his autumn rambles until he could leave his friend in a better frame of mind. He assisted him into the *fiacre*, and they drove back to the hotel. Here Sir Frederic insisted on Neville remaining quiet, while he sought the police.

"I know everything as well as you, and can act for you as well as you could act for yourself. I tell you, you are more shaken by that attack than you know, and if you don't take care you'll be laid on your beam ends again."

With these words of wisdom he sallied forth, and after a few directions from the host, strolled down the beautiful Rue Rivoli, feeling, in spite of friendship and sympathy, something of the infectious brightness and gayety of the place. At the junction of the Rue Royale and the Place de la Concorde, he stood for a few moments watching the stream of vehicles setting towards

the Champs Elysées, when his eye suddenly brightened, and his cheek flushed, for a pale young face, enshrined in a dainty bonnet, bent forward to him from a smart open carriage, and a small, neatly-gloved hand was rather eagerly waved."

A large lady who accompanied this pleasant vision arrested the coachman, and the vehicle was drawn up by the pavement, and the next moment Sir Frederic held the little hand in his.

"What an unexpected pleasure!" he exclaimed after he had exchanged greetings with Miss Delvigne and her companion, Mrs. Coleman. "When did you arrive? I had no idea I should see you in Paris."

"Neither Evelina nor Miss Delvigne has ever been to Paris before; so, as my eldest daughter has gone on a visit to an old school friend in Scotland, we set off, and are only awaiting Mr. Coleman to start for Germany."

"But *I* knew you were here, Sir Frederic," said the heiress, "and we are at the same hotel. I inquired for you this morning, but you were out. I have a letter Miss Redoubt sent me the night before last, directed to Mademoiselle Delvigne. I brought it with me, for I do not think any one but Captain Neville ought to open it. How is poor Captain Neville?"

"Oh, he is better, though weak enough still;

but this letter? Why, it may reveal everything. Where is it?"

"In my dressing-case. I must give it to you. Do, dear Mrs. Coleman, drive back to Meurice's and let me get the letter."

"Well, my dear, half an hour will not make much difference; and I promised to call for Evelina at the *coiffeur's*."

The young heiress's countenance fell.

"Just let me out, then; and Sir Frederic will take care of me back—it is such a short way."

Before the startled Mrs. Coleman could agree or dissent from this audacious proposal, Sir Frederic had opened the carriage-door, and Miss Delvigne stood upon the pavement.

"Well, then, I suppose you must," said Mrs. Coleman, not so much averse, under the peculiar circumstances, as she otherwise would have been to so unorthodox a proceeding.

"I shall return in less than half an hour, and take you to the Bois de Boulogne."

She bowed, smiled, and drove away.

"You had better take my arm in this crowd," said Sir Frederic, feeling unaccountably elated and joyous. "You are our good genius, Miss Delvigne," he continued, as she accepted his offer; "if we find my poor friend's wife, it will be through you. You always bring good luck."

"I am not sure," she said in her simple manner,

though secretly pleased at the ill-repressed joy of her companion at their rencontre.

"This letter has a French stamp, and is directed with such pale ink, and in such a queer, cramped hand—such an ugly hand—I am sure it is from some cross old woman; perhaps it is from Marie's aunt; perhaps it is nothing particular. I have been greatly tempted to open it,—I should I think, only we were just coming on here, and Mr. Foster told me you would be at Meurice's."

"You might have opened it, I dare say; but as Neville will have it so soon, it is of little consequence. Suppose we go round through the Tuileries Gardens—it is such a charming day," added the young Baronet.

"How?" asked Miss Delvigne, a little indignantly—"when there is so important a matter on hand?"

"Well, you see," said Sir Frederic hesitatingly—"I wish, if possible, to prolong the pleasure of a walk with you—a pleasure I have so little chance of tasting again; for I know too well what an idiot I have been—what a bad impression I must have made on your mind. I am the most unlucky dog in the universe!"

The heiress looked up in his face with an air of the sincerest surprise. Then an amused expression stole round her mouth as she noted his look of vexation.

"Oh! if you mean I am vexed because you did not want to marry me, you are quite mistaken. When I thought you did, I hated you. But it is such a pity you did not contrive to tell me candidly at first that you were not going to second your grandfather's plans, and that I was all safe—we would have been such friends; for then I would never have proposed to Marie to pass for me, and no mischief would have been done."

This very candid speech was annihilating to poor Sir Frederic. He was silent for a few minutes.

"Your words," he said at length, and very gloomily, "prove the truth of my assertion, I am most unfortunate."

They were now at the entrance of Meurice's, and Miss Delvigne, struck by the tone of his last words, kept silence, while they ascended to Mrs. Coleman's *salon*.

"Wait a few minutes—I will bring you the letter immediately," she said, and left the room.

Those few minutes Sir Frederic employed in walking up and down, and forming a resolution.

"Here it is," said the heiress, re-entering. "Just look at it, Sir Frederic; is it not a curious hand?"

"It is," he returned, speaking slowly. "But I think it is a man's."

"Do you really—I had determined it was the aunt's."

"Miss Delvigne," began Sir Frederic, "I shall take your advice and speak with candor to prevent future mistakes or mischief. In spite of your evident indifference, I love you—most truly, most fondly—your unselfishness, your earnest thoughtful friendship, the strength and tenderness you have shown throughout this unhappy matter might well fascinate any man—and it makes me mad to think what a treasure I have lost the chance of securing! for after all it was but a chance. Do not let this avowal influence your making use of me as your veriest tool in the search for poor Mrs. Neville. I will never again offend you in the same way. But remember, I love you." He took and warmly kissed her hand.

Before she had recovered the astonishment his words had caused her, he had left the room. The young heiress laughed, stopped suddenly, looked in the glass and smiled, and then all at once, in an unaccountable and unreasonable manner, burst into a hearty fit of crying.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEVILLE was sleeping when Sir Frederic returned to his room, after half-an-hour's solitary, but not altogether unsatisfactory reflection. Come what would Miss Delvigne could not say he had left her in ignorance of his sentiments. But perhaps she might shun him now; well, he would not think about it any more, but commit himself to the winds and waves of circumstance.

The kindly consideration, which was one of the young Baronet's characteristics, would not permit himself to rouse his friend from the tranquil repose he appeared to be enjoying. So he drew a chair and sat playing with the letter he held, thinking in a desultory manner.

At last Neville turned uneasily and ground his teeth, muttering "Marie—Marie."

"Well, open your eyes, old fellow; here—here's something perhaps that will give you tidings of her."

Neville raised himself on his elbow, and gazed bewildered at his friend, while he rapidly recounted his meeting with Miss Delvigne—omitting his own exposition of feeling—and then he

handed the letter to Neville, who by this time, fully roused, had sat up on the sofa. He tore it open, and devoured the contents with eager eyes.

"It is from an Alphonse something," he exclaimed; "look, Compton." And Sir Frederic read over his shoulder.

"No. 39, RUE d'AUVERGNE, PASSY.

"MY BEAUTIFUL AND GOOD COUSIN,

"The dear aunt charges me to keep thee informed of her health, and to demand thy news. For she disquiets herself that she has not received letters from thee for a long time. The dear aunt has consented to share the humble abode of her nephew and dutiful relative, since the death of Monsieur, the proprietor of her residence in the rue St. Lazare, since three months past; it is, therefore, possible that some of thy little billets may not have reached our dear relative. I therefore pray thee write without delay, because she is a little out of humor against thee, and like all charming ladies, has her caprices, more or less embittered. Nevertheless, knowing the simplicity of thy tranquil life, we are at rest concerning thee. We do the impossible to render our dear aunt as happy as we can.

"She has a new *directeur*, a man very distinguished, and my wife is a little sympathetic so-

ciety for her. When, dear and good cousin, thou canst arrange a *congé* for a few weeks, my wife and myself shall be delighted to receive thee for a little diversion after the solemnities of that sad but respectable country, where so much money is made, and so little enjoyed.

“With many embraces from my wife, and the benediction of the dear aunt,

“I am, with friendship sincere and respectful,

“My dear cousin’s devoted kinsman,

“ALPHONSE DUPUIS.”

At the conclusion of this characteristic epistle Neville looked up with a blank expression. “Not much information there,” he said.

“I don’t know ; you have got the address we want at any rate. But it is evident they know nothing more than we do. What’s the date? Six days back. No ; there will not be much to learn there. Still I must see this man ; let us go to Passy directly.”

A *fiacre* was called, and they started. The *trajet* was long, and of course tiresome ; but at least it was not aggravated by the feverish expectation which had at once irritated and supported Neville on former occasions ; a dull kind of apathetic despair was stealing over his heart, like the cold-induced slumber of the snow-slayed traveller, who sinks, thus lulled, to death. In his weak state destiny seemed too strong for him.

But the long drive was to no avail when, after some inquiries, the friends discovered the rue d'Auvergne,—which, by the way, was considerably less important than its name. They found the dear aunt too unwell to see any one; Monsieur gone to his *bureau*, and all the rest of the world gone out.

With some difficulty they obtained the address of Monsieur's *bureau*—in a passage off the rue de Richelieu,—and thither they patiently wended their way, and were at last successful in finding Monsieur Alphonse, who conducted the foreign correspondence of a large silk warehouse, and had a dark den in the *entresol* all to himself.

He was a short, broad man, with close-cut black hair, and a close-shaven blue beard, showing clearly round cheek and chin, small mustache, and the necessary chin-tuft, being all of his hirsute honors left unshorn. He had a semi-military look, and eager, glancing jet-black eyes. He was considerably puzzled by the visit, and Neville's intricate story, told in the best French at his and the Baronet's command, was still more inexplicable. Finally the little man grew very wroth.

"It appears to me," he said between his teeth, addressing Sir Frederic, whose French was the most comprehensible of the two; "that your friend is a scoundrel. Where, then, is my cousin?

Poor child—so good—so wise. What a country—what a society! *Mon Dieu!* That a girl so prudent should have been contaminated! Where, then, is my cousin?"

"Quietly," returned Sir Frederic, more amused than angry; "that is precisely the question we come to ask you;" "and," put in Neville, "as her husband, I have surely some title to your commiseration. I would give all I possess to find her."

"Her husband!" repeated the bewildered Alphonse, somewhat mollified at the magic word. "Why did she leave you, then? Ah! there is some deep villainy here."

"By Heaven!" cried the Baronet in despair, "we've made a mess of it. We shouldn't have stirred without Miss Delvigne; let us go for her; she will explain it better than we can."

"Yes!" the Frenchman was saying meantime, "some villain has got her ear, and has taken advantage of some cruelty on your part. A woman leave her husband without a companion! Bah!" The last force of contemptuous incredulity was thrown into his "bah!" "But a girl so well brought up. True, she was a Protestant—slightly an *esprit fort*."

"Silence!" cried Neville furiously. "Remember you speak of my wife."

The hearty feeling in his voice and manner touched the good-natured little Frenchman.

“Monsieur is not without heart,” he muttered.

“Come,” interposed Sir Frederic, “there’s no use getting angry; and we only half understand each other. There is a lady of rank,” he went on; with unconscious tact, “at present in Paris, the dear friend of Madame Neville, your cousin, who speaks French like an angel. If Monsieur could spare time to accompany us to Meurice’s, she will fully explain all things.”

At the mention of a lady, the Frenchman subsided a good deal; and, after speaking to a subordinate, and locking up sundry drawers and desks, he declared himself ready to accompany Messieurs.

Though but a few hours had elapsed since Sir Frederic had spoken so openly as to his sentiments, he was so much interested in the matter in hand that he met Miss Delvigne with little or no embarrassment; a grave and distant respect marked his manner.

It was announced, on inquiring from her maid, that “Miss Delvigne was indisposed with a bad headache, and lying down.”

“Give her my card,” said Neville, hastily tracing a line in pencil upon it.

“Delvigne! *mais comment?*” cried M. Dupuis.

“Wait awhile; the lady will tell you all about it.”

Neville's card and message brought the heir-ess very quickly to their presence, and she, blushing vividly as she met Sir Frederic's eye, soon comprehended the *tableau*.

After some quiet explanation, the sanguine Frenchman began to perceive the true position of affairs, and to glean, as he imagined, that his little cousin had made a great *parti*.

He immediately began to hope that her disappearance was but temporary—that she could not long live apart from a husband so worthy and so distinguished—that all things would terminate happily, and the *belle enfant* reign triumphant in the most brilliant circles of London. Perhaps even now a letter, full of intelligence and good tidings, was awaiting him, the faithful friend, at his domicile. "*Mon Dieu !*" he would fly at once to see. He had the honor to salute Mademoiselle. He would keep himself *en rapport* with Monsieur, his much-esteemed cousin, etc., etc.

There was a time when Neville would have shrunk not a little from the kindred thus claimed by the good little Alphonse; now it mattered not.

Undertaking to put the police on the alert to discover any possible trace of the lost girl which might be found in France, and which, as a native, he could better do, he bid them an elaborate adieu.

"You know there is not the least use in it all," said Miss Delvigne to Neville; "she never crossed the Channel. She is in London, I feel an unaccountable conviction."

"How is it, then, that we have failed?" returned Neville dejectedly.

"I cannot tell; but what more is to be done? Oh! to sit idle is terrible when she—"

Miss Delvigne stopped abruptly, the tears pouring down her pale cheek, and Sir Frederic made a movement towards her, which he hastily checked.

"I feel unhinged, and am not like myself," she was beginning, apologetically, when Mrs. Coleman and her daughter entered, and the conversation became general, ending in an invitation from that respectable matron to dine and spend the evening, which Neville at first refused, and then, at the instigation of his friend, accepted.

When the little party reassembled at seven o'clock, Sir Frederic was a good deal disturbed at the kind of affectionate sisterly attention lavished by Miss Delvigne on Neville.

She silently drew forward the most comfortable fauteuil for his accommodation, and closed the window lest he should suffer from the draught, and seemed to make him a sort of screen between herself and Compton.

The good-natured young Baronet felt almost

sulky. "By Jove, that French girl will drown herself, or hang herself, and then Neville will marry the heiress;" but the next moment he laughed at his own fancies, and devoted himself to the amusement of Miss Evelina Coleman with that remarkable success which not unusually attends the efforts of well-to-do baronets.

The dinner finished, the members of the little party were sufficiently well pleased with each other not to separate after the meal was over. But Neville, unfit for exertion, availed himself of his reputation as an invalid to say good-night, considerably before Sir Frederic thought of stirring.

He had not, however, been many minutes gone, before, to the surprise of every one, he returned again, holding a letter open in his hand.

"This is an eventful day, Compton—here's a letter from Mr. Foster—found it in my room when I went up—he says my brother has been thrown out of a Hansom and is very seriously injured; that after lying insensible for several hours, he asked twice for me; and your grandfather concludes by recommending my immediate return."

"And you?" asked Sir Frederic, eagerly.

"Will go at once; that is, by the earliest train."

"Will it not knock you up terribly?" said Miss Delvigne.

"No; I feel quite strong again! besides wishing to see my brother, as *he* wishes it, your strong impression respecting Marie makes me anxious to be back once more in London."

With some hasty apologies to Mrs. Coleman for quitting her so unceremoniously,—the young men left together, Neville to make preparations, and write to Monsieur Dupuis, and his "fides Achates" to assist him.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE evening but one after the conversation described a few chapters back, Marie had found the Bushel household in a ferment of joy. Mr. Watson had given Mr. Bushel a clerkship in a branch office which Foster and Co. had established for shipping and other purposes at Southampton.

"With rooms, my dear!" cried Mrs. Bushel at the top of her voice—"four rooms, a light closet, two attics, and a kitchen! ample accommodation, rent free. The salary is not high—£150 to begin with—nor will Mr. Bushel be the manager *at first*" (with emphasis); "but I have no doubt ere long he will be promoted when the present manager gets a step. Miss Thibaut, my love! I feel persuaded *you* have brought us luck, if it be not irreligious to say so. The little help we were able to afford you impressed that great and good Mr. Watson favorably, and so inclined him to befriend us! My sweet Agnes will revive when she breathes the briny air of the ocean wave, and altogether it is too delightful."

"I am truly glad to hear such good tidings,"

exclaimed Marie. "But they are not good for me—I shall lose my only friends! When do you leave?"

"Well," said Mrs. Bushel, "that is just the question. Go, my dears"—to the children—"go down to the kitchen and make us a nice bit of toast. It is quite chill and wintry this evening."

"Law, mar," cried Augusta Jane. "You only want to get rid of us that you may talk secrets with Miss Thibaut."

"Never you mind, but get along," returned her mother. "That's just it," repeated Mrs. Bushel as the last skirt whisked round the door. "The only drawback to all this good luck is the difficulty of moving. Of course we have given notice to quit, but to move the furniture and buy a few clothes, and pay a trifle or two here (we really owe very little), will take every penny of fifty pounds, and that is not to be picked up in the gutter!"

"No, indeed," said Marie. "What do you intend to do?"

"Oh! Mr. Bushel has gone to a very respectable loan office in Blackfriars Road, as helped us once before, and no doubt will again; the percentage is high, and I *know* Bushel will have to insure his life! Still, at such a crisis it won't do to stick at trifles; I am determined to start in a fortnight by hook or by crook, and as soon as I can get Mr. Bushel a few clothes to his back

he shall be off before us. Tell me, my dear, what had I better get for Augusta Jane and Agnes? Something to look smart and wear well, you Frenchwomen have such taste," etc., etc., etc. A long and profoundly interesting discussion ensued, after which Marie walked quickly back, as night was closing in, thinking with hearty regret that her kind though humble friend was so soon to be removed out of her reach. Was she always to be desolate and friendless?

As she approached the Institution she was struck by the unwonted appearance of animation which it presented, as its usual aspect at this hour was dark and doleful, especially at the side towards the narrow street dignified by the appellation of "Pelham Park."

The door stood open, the entrance was lit up, and Marie could see the matron in eager conversation with a gentleman, while a dark brougham drawn by a large steady horse stood before the entrance, behind which a four-wheeler was drawn up, from the top of which the driver was lifting a black box. "What has happened?" thought Marie, hastening her steps, while her heart beat with vague apprehension.

"Oh! Miss Thibaut," cried the matron as she ran up the steps, "I am so glad you have come! poor Mr. Watson has had such a dreadful accident! It is a distinct intervention of Providence

that he was not killed—indeed he is still in danger!”

“Oh, how! what has happened?” exclaimed Marie, feeling herself turn pale and cold, for she heartily loved the stern, silent man, with whom she felt at once so strangely sympathetic yet in awe. “Where is he?”

“He drove up in a hansom not five minutes after you had gone out; he wanted to see you—something about Mrs. Bushel, I think, for when I said as this was Thursday you had probably gone to Tivoli Gardens, he said that would be better, as he wished to see Mrs. Bushel also. He got into the hansom again, and had not gone five yards when the horse began to rear and jump, and somehow got its hind leg over the front. I believe the harness broke, and then Mr. Watson tried to get out, and everything seemed smashed up together. I nearly fainted, for I stood a minute at the door after he got into the cab, and so I saw it all. A lot of people gathered round, and Mr. Watson was carried in here in an awful condition. We sent for the nearest doctor, and he says that it is marvellous he has escaped as he has—his left leg is broken, his head contused, and he is bruised all over; and when he found who he was he telegraphed for his valet, and the valet brought a great doctor and a hospital nurse, and no end of things. That was him

speaking to me just now—such a nice, steady, responsible man; but come in—come in! we want every one's help, for the place is regularly turned out of the windows."

"What a misfortune!" cried Marie, tears coming to her relief. "Oh, do you think he will die?"

"How can I tell? He is in God's hands," returned the matron rather crossly; "only if he does, I suppose the Institution will be broke up, and you and I sent packing. Come in and have a cup of tea; there is a good one still in the pot." As they crossed the hall to the matron's sitting-room they encountered a slight, dark, keen, authoritative looking man, who had just come out of the school-room, followed by the local doctor and a stout woman of severe aspect in an apron and cap—unmistakably the professional nurse.

"On the whole he has escaped wonderfully," said the slight gentleman, who was a celebrated surgeon, as he walked towards the door. "The great difficulty will be to keep off fever; he must be watched night and day. Who have you to help the nurse?"

"There are several women in the establishment who might assist," said the doctor, "or he might have a day and a night nurse, expense being in this case no object. He has asked for some one named Mary."

"Ah! well, let him have every possible care; he needs it all."

"If I can help in any way," said Marie, coming forward timidly, "pray permit me to be of use. Mr. Watson has been a benefactor to me—and—and perhaps I am the Marie he asked for."

"Ah! very likely!" returned the doctor.

The great surgeon looked at her sharply. "She seems intelligent," he said to the nurse. "Have you informed Mr. Watson's partner of this affair?"

"He is unfortunately out of town," returned the local M.D., "and for the moment they do not know his exact address; no doubt to-morrow—"

"Ah, yes," interrupted the great surgeon, "these business men must always leave tracks; they cannot afford to be out of sight. Well, to-morrow I will be round by nine; everything depends on keeping down fever."

The great man made a slight comprehensive bow, and hurried into his brougham, which immediately drove off.

"For to-night, then," said the doctor to the nurse, "you will take entire charge. To-morrow ask what assistance you require."

"I shall let you know," she returned with severe composure. "If this young person"—a keen look at Marie—"will undertake to come

to and fro, and carry out my orders, we will do well enough."

"And I am sure," said the matron piously, "I desire no better than to be spent in the service of our excellent patron and employer."

"I shall send for you if needful," returned the professional nurse. "Take off your bonnet," she continued to Marie, "and come to the patient's room. I should like to know if you are the person he asked for; if so, you may be useful."

"Well, I am sure you are highly favored," observed Mrs. Roper, the matron, as the nurse turned and walked towards the sick-room with a step wonderfully light and active.

"We will all do our best," said Marie, as she ran up-stairs to put off her out-door dress.

The school-room on the ground-floor had been appropriated to the injured patron of the institution, and on entering with slow and noiseless step, a beating heart, and anxious eyes, Marie was struck by the metamorphose that had been made in the bare and comfortless apartment. Curtains had been hung before the windows, and a Turkey carpet laid upon the floor, all during the four or five hours of her absence; a long table, covered with all kinds of miscellaneous articles which could possibly be of use in a sick-room; and there, upon a curtainless bed,

his head all bandaged, lay the sufferer. The nurse beckoned her: "Hold his head while I change his pillow," she said; "he is so hot." No sooner had Mr. Watson felt the touch of Marie's hand, as she tenderly and firmly slipped it under his cheek, than he feebly opened his eyes, and a sort of shadow of a smile flitted over his face. "Ay! you are the right person," whispered the nurse, who was quietly watching. "If you can keep your heart steady, and your nerves in order, you may be of much use."

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This untoward event completely upset the ordinary routine of the Pelham Park girls' school.

The principal room was occupied by the sufferer, while every one connected with the establishment was more or less occupied with him. His "personal attendant," a sedate man of oppressive respectability, took the chief direction, subject only to the nurse.

A prim housekeeper from the patient's own residence came to and fro with jellies and soups, and fruits and cushions, and heaps of linen, and all the comforts which the wealthy can command. A mild-mannered elderly man—one of the head clerks—came also daily with anxious inquiries; but was not permitted to see the sufferer for more than a week.

To him Marie ventured to address herself, for she was sore perplexed. She knew how vexed Mr. Watson would be when he came to know that the routine of the school had been broken. "Might it not be well," she asked, after explaining her anxieties to Mr. Wilkins, the above-mentioned clerk, "would it not be well to hire a room in the neighborhood, where I could continue to hold the classes?"

This seemed a good suggestion to Mr. Wilkins, who quite entered into Marie's views in the matter, and appeared well acquainted with his employer's plans and wishes. He therefore empowered Marie to make such arrangements as she could, and she gladly availed herself of this means of keeping her classes together.

The labor thus entailed upon her was not light.

The nurse soon discovered that her assistance was most valuable during the night, as her presence seemed to have a soothing effect upon the patient, and though Nurse Simpson could never be said to shirk her work, she had no objection to volunteer help.

So it came to pass that Marie generally spent the first hours of the night by Mr. Watson's bedside, while the nurse slumbered in an elaborately comfortable chair, quite ready if called upon, yet enjoying complete repose.

Then at eight o'clock our little heroine was

up, dressed, alert, hastily swallowing a cup of coffee before starting for her provisional school-room, strengthened by the knowledge that she was doing her best to carry out the wishes of her kind benefactor who lay silent and helpless.

For though evidently conscious he never spoke for the first week. He seemed to recognize Marie by the kind of faint, shadowy smile that sometimes gleamed for a moment in the poor, weary eyes that strove to follow her, and then closed as if the effort were too much.

The night of the seventh day the nurse had composed herself to sleep; and Marie, having noiselessly arranged the cooling drink, the medicine, the sundry etceteras needed by the sick, sat down by the bed, and as ever, when not actively employed, her thoughts flew back to the sweetness, the agony of the past. For the future she took little heed; the bitterness which still pervaded the present left her no courage to look forward. Her meditations were disturbed by the sound of her own name faintly breathed; she turned at once to the speaker, much surprised, as Mr. Watson had never in all their previous intercourse called her by her Christian name.

"Marie!"

"I am here," she returned softly.

"I shall not die, Marie," he said, very low, but distinctly. "I begin to feel alive again."

"I trust—I believe the good God will spare you to us, dear sir," she whispered, trying to steady her voice, for she was greatly moved. "Stay with me," he returned, and again closed his eyes.

"I will, as long as ever you need me," she replied in the same soft tone, and taking his nerveless hand she stroked it with filial tenderness.

The rest of the night passed in silence; but these few words gave Marie fresh power of endurance, and a gleam of hope. To be of use—to be of value to some one, and that one her benefactor, the only friend left to her,—it was soothing; it was all of good her life could now promise, and she ardently thanked God for this consolation.

The great care and skill lavished on the patient soon began to tell; within a few more days the feverish symptoms had almost completely abated, and Mr. Watson, though terribly weak and needing constant watching, was himself again in the sense of intelligence and understanding his position. With returning strength and clearness his demands on Marie's time increased. He seemed gentler and brighter than when in health, though by no means guiltless of the irritability natural to convalescence.

One afternoon Marie was met on her return from her provisional school-room by the an-

nouncement that Mr. Watson had been asking for her, and was impatient at her absence.

"Where have you been?" he asked, directly she entered his room.

"I have been giving the afternoon lessons."

"Sit down," he said more quietly. "I want to ask you many things; I see I am in the girls' school-room, and I fear this unfortunate accident has broken up the school which was working so well."

Marie explained as shortly and clearly as she could the measures which, with Mr. Wilkins' sanction, she had adopted. A look of profound satisfaction overspread his face as he listened—"Wilkins is a good and faithful servant, and I would say the same of you, only that I would not apply the term servant to one who—" he paused suddenly.

"But I am quite content to be your servant—your faithful, useful servant if I only can," returned Marie, the tears springing to her eyes—"you who have been my best, and are my only friend!"

Mr. Watson was silent for a moment, and then said very low, but distinctly, "Be mine; and when I am myself again, for I feel the good God will grant me a further term of life, you shall tell me your history, and perhaps there may be better and brighter days before you and myself?"

"I will," returned Marie, moved by an impulse she could not account for, or resist. "I will tell you everything as soon as you are strong enough to hear a sad story of misfortunes, and perhaps mistakes."

Mr. Watson looked very earnestly at her, but a restful expression stole over his face. "I am content with your assurance," he said; "and will wait till you are ready to speak, and I am strong enough to hear."

Marie, inexpressibly touched by the rare tenderness shown towards her by this cold, stern, self-contained man, bent her head and gently touched the feeble hand which lay upon the coverlet with her lips. Mr. Watson lay perfectly still, a slight smile playing round his lips, and when it passed away Marie thought he slept, and so kept very quiet. Some time passed, how long she could not tell, when he roused her by saying suddenly—not as though he had awoke from sleep, but spoken clearly out of deliberate thought—"You must find some one to take your classes; now that I am better I should like you to read to me in the morning or afternoon. I begin to feel the time hang heavily."

"I shall endeavor to do so. Do you not think I might continue to take the morning classes, which are the most important, and find some one to fill my place in the afternoon, when you would need me more?"

"You must not wear yourself out," he returned, in a weak and weary tone. "You are looking ill and fatigued." He sank into silence, and this time really to sleep.

So it came about that Marie was installed as reader and chief attendant, while she was almost released from her night-watching. Nor did she find herself as much worried by small annoyances as might have been expected in her peculiar and rather anomalous position. Mrs. Roper, the matron, was no doubt considerably huffed and jealous at that "bit of a teacher" being preferred before her, and gave many hints on the subject. But all Mr. Watson's personal attendants and dependants were thoroughly under his influence and control—nay, more. He was a man who could be approached and yet believed in. The men and women in his service were devoted to, yet afraid of him; his will was law. Since he began to recover and be more like himself, Marie observed that he never addressed her by her Christian name; that he grew colder and more formal; yet there was something brighter and softer in his voice and aspect, an indefinable change which lessened her fear of him; and in some vague, unreasonable way gave rise to a sort of hope, of she knew not what.

Certainly the books he selected were not live-

ly or interesting—solemn, theological treatises, expositions on the most obscure passages of the Old Testament, speculations as to the probable meaning of the wildest visions in Revelations.

It was hard work to Marie, and a strange puzzle to her how a man of Mr. Watson's strong, practical intellect could be satisfied with such mental pabulum. "Surely it is an altogether English mind that possesses this power of separating the active from the speculative side of his character, and how true he is! he tries to live up to his religious idea! If every one were like him what an irreproachable, dreary world this would be! I am afraid I am very wicked and worthless to think so," sighed Marie to herself, as she turned over the pages of a voluminous work on the application of Nebuchadnezzar's vision to later history. Had Marie's knowledge and experience been larger she would probably have added to her conjectures respecting a Watson-like world, that it might be more decorous, and yet show more appalling crimes and more numerous madhouses.

"Do you not think, dear sir," she said after reading for some time, struck by the strained, far-away look in her listener's eyes, and fearing the subject was not altogether good for him,— "do you not think that something different from this book would be better for you? Freeman's *Essays* are charming; I once had a chance of

reading them at a friend's house;—and then they deal with facts, not mere fancies like this.”

Mr. Watson looked up, startled, and then smiled a somewhat grim smile. “You think yourself wiser than the learned and laborious man who has devoted years to the consideration of these depths of holy writ,” he said.

“Pray do not think me presumptuous,” cried Marie, coloring. “Probably my mind is too slight and shallow to appreciate such writing; but I feared it must weary you, or be too strong a strain on your attention.”

“That is, *you* find it wearisome,” he returned.

“Yes! very wearisome,” said Marie frankly, with a smile.

“Then you must stop,” he said gravely.

“No, no. If you like the book I am pleased to read to you.”

“I often wished to speak to you on the question of your faith,” said Mr. Watson after a short pause, after checking Marie in her attempt to recommence her reading by a wave of the hand. “I fear your religious opinions are very unsettled; perhaps this may in some measure account for other miseries.”

“I am afraid my opinions are very unsettled on many subjects,” returned Marie with a sigh, “especially on religion; but I do not think they have affected my life.”

“How can you tell? Religious conviction

lies at the root of everything. Will you let me strive to guide you right, my poor child? It may be given to me to save your soul alive."

"I would gladly follow your guidance," whispered Marie. "I see how noble and self-denying your life is. But I do not think I should be happier were I to think like you."

"Self-denying?" repeated Watson, not heeding the rest of her sentence. "I fear I am growing self-indulgent; and yet," he went on dreamily, as if to himself, "does not Holy Scripture itself say, 'Love is the whole fulfilling of the law?' I fear there has been more law than love in my life. Have I, then, been Pharisaical? omitting mercy and sympathy for others—substituting justice for equity? Much light seems to come to me, Marie, in this sick-room! I have judged too much and loved too little, and so have not won the love of those I live with."

"But all love you, Mr. Watson," exclaimed Marie; "only we are afraid to show it! You ought to let yourself enjoy your own goodness more. You make your life hard when it ought to be joyous."

"Who taught you all this? Ah! human nature is a treacherous thing; it must be crushed and kept in check! The weakness of the flesh is incurable if for a moment we relax the self-watchfulness necessary to keep the heart pure. How hard to regain the footing lost!"

"What a dreary faith! Surely you make our Father in Heaven a terrible taskmaster. Do you not think He would be as well pleased if we did our work which He has given us to do heartily, helped all those we can help, and left the purifying of our hearts to Him? Think what discomfort and soreness and mental misery we would save, and how much kinder we should feel! I know I ought not to argue with one so much wiser and better than myself, yet I must tell out my thoughts."

"We may help each other," returned Mr. Watson gravely. "You suggest the possibility of much happiness dare I believe as you do. Yet—And you say I am loved? I never supposed it possible."

"Ah yes! it is quite possible. I love you—if you will forgive me for presuming to say so ;—only I fear you. But since you have suffered, and I have been able to help you ever so little, I seem to love you more."

Marie spoke with the unhesitating candor of a daughter—a child. Mr. Watson smiled a wonderfully tender smile for so rugged a countenance. "I thank you," he said—"thank you heartily. Perhaps—"

What was to follow Marie never knew, for a discreet tap on the door interrupted the speaker, followed by the appearance of Mr. Watson's man.

"If you please, sir," he said in his grave, deliberate voice, "Mr. Foster has just come and wishes to know if you can receive him."

"Certainly, Roberts. Show him in," replied Mr. Watson, with a complete change of voice and manner.

"I can come again when you send for me," said Marie, rising with an odd, startled feeling at the sound of a name with which she had been so familiar a few months ago. She hoped to escape before the visitor entered, but he came too quickly.

As Marie reached the door it opened to admit him. Marie shrank partly behind it, and the newcomer, entering rapidly, did not even see her, as she stood in the shadow.

"Ah! my dear Watson, this is indeed a sad business," exclaimed a smart, well-dressed, typical old English gentleman, who entered briskly, with a set, amiable smile on his neat old face. "I was away in the Tyrol when the news reached me—thought to have a quiet little holiday; and I have travelled as hard as I could ever since. Really, now, you look better than I expected. How, in Heaven's name, did this accident happen?"

Before he had finished speaking, Marie had rushed away to the solitude of her own room, overwhelmed, dismayed. She could not be mistaken. Though she had never seen him but

once before, she instantly recognized her friend Marie Delvigne's guardian, Sir Frederic Compton's grandfather.

She was then in the toils! Who—who was Mr. Watson? Probably an acquaintance—possibly a friend of Guy Neville and of his elder brother. If she avowed herself, as she now felt bound to do, what would become of her? Would these proud, cold, stern men pronounce sentence of condemnation upon her? What was to become of her?

She felt her only chance lay in the friendship—the protection of Mr. Watson. She would confide in him so soon as he was equal to hear her tale; but—she could not tell why—but she felt a conviction that it would agitate and upset him, and that she must wait till his strength was more completely restored before she could venture to disclose the short but eventful story of her life.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE depression and hopelessness of the last few months were now succeeded by feverish dread and expectation. Although Marie's knowledge of Guy Neville's connections and position was vague, she was aware that he had a brother who was partner in the great firm of which old Mr. Foster was the head; and though it did not necessarily follow that Mr. Watson had any personal acquaintance with her husband, still the danger of detection seemed drawing very near. Pondering anxiously on her position, poor Marie could see nothing but pain and difficulty around and before her. As to Guy himself, would he be really glad to find her again? or would it not add to his perplexities? Would it not have been better and braver to have awaited his return on that terrible disastrous day of shame and humiliation, and then insisted on the dissolution of their marriage—if such a thing were possible? Had she not put the finishing stroke to her husband's troubles? and when they met—if they ever met—would he not resent her conduct? Yet, had he not sinned against her? What

reason had he to deceive himself—for she had never deceived him? Nevertheless, he had loved her, though but for a short time; this she could not doubt. She had read it in his eyes, and felt it in the touch of his hand, the pressure of his lips! Even there, in the solitude of her room, she blushed and trembled as she recalled those short and thrilling moments. And suppose she had succeeded in effacing herself? What an awful fate! never again to see the face of any one she had loved or known! Why, she could now cry for joy to meet the old aunt who had not shown her over much tenderness or consideration, while she yearned to throw herself into Marie Delvigne's arms and sob out her sorrow there with a great longing!

Then, again, was she not doing Guy a great wrong in thus concealing herself? and was it not a wrong which every day accumulated? How was she to extricate herself from the consequence of her own selfish, heedless haste?

Through all this tangle of thought one idea grew clearer and more urgent the longer she reflected. It was a desire for Mr. Watson's advice and assistance. Her affection for him—her confidence in his kindness and knowledge and high principle—had increased infinitely during their late daily intercourse. She longed, yet dreaded, to tell him all; not that she so much feared his condemnation, but that

he would pass an awful sentence condemning her to return to the husband she had left and seek to win him, and to do her duty, albeit coldly and reluctantly received!

Mr. Foster paid rather a long visit, and Mr. Watson was too weary afterwards to be read to or to converse, and the following day was chiefly occupied with Mr. Wilkins, with the same result. But the second day after the startling appearance of Mr. Foster the patient was wonderfully better, had slept well, and was quite anxious to talk, to be read to,—in short, to be amused in any way. Taking advantage of this favorable condition of things, the nurse asked leave to absent herself for a couple of hours, and left her charge in Miss Thibaut's care, professing much confidence in that young lady's watchfulness and capability.

"I am glad to be quiet," said Mr. Watson, as Marie drew a little table on which lay her work and the big book about Daniel. "Yesterday and the day before were much, though unavoidably, disturbed. You are always quietly busy; it soothes me to see you work. No, I will not ask you to read the book you dislike so much. Let us talk. Tell me about the school, and how you have arranged."

Marie, glad to begin a subject so far away from what occupied her thoughts, gave him an

account of her plans and progress. He did not listen very attentively, nor did he notice her much, and she had carefully placed herself away from the light.

"I have been thinking much of our last conversation," said Mr. Watson rather abruptly, after a silence of some minutes had succeeded Marie's report of the school and the scholars. "You said we should leave the purifying of the heart to God, and do all the good we can. This seems too easy for our self-indulgent natures; yet your words haunt me!"

"I am afraid my words are seldom worth thinking about," said Marie, with a smile. "My experience and knowledge are but slight."

"Nevertheless, you speak like one who thinks! How old are you, Marie?" Her name came quite naturally to his lips.

"I shall be twenty next week," she said, with a little quivering sigh.

"Only twenty! Why, I had taken my degree, and wrestled with many a doubt and many a temptation some years before you were born; and yet your young, half-formed mind appears to grasp truths that almost escape me."

"Ah! my dear sir! that is because I *feel* instead of reasoning."

"No matter what the process, your words have so far impressed me that I have held out a friendly hand to a relative from whom I have

been a good deal estranged, and with whom I have had good cause to be displeased. I have directed Wilkins to write for my brother."

"You are always good," murmured Marie, adding, with a smile, "You know you must forgive him unto seventy times seven!"

Mr. Watson smiled too. "My brother has been very trying to me. He is a good deal younger than I am. I am the son of our father's first marriage. My mother brought a large fortune and a share in the firm in which I am partner, to my father, who was aristocratic, but impoverished. My brother was the son of a beautiful, high-born woman—bright, witty, thoughtless. I, who scarce remembered my own mother, was well inclined to love and admire her; but she treated me with a sort of half-contemptuous kindness. She mocked my plebeian looks (I took after my mother's people), and used to laugh, a sweet, careless laugh, and call me "the little Puritan," "young Ironsides." She meant no harm, but she gave me many a bitter pang—many a lever to the devil to shake my soul. Then her boy was a splendid fellow—generous, daring, arrogant, insolent, truthful, full of spirit,—despising me utterly! I could see that the sympathy of every one about the house, which my mother's money, or rather mine, kept up, from the lady's maid to the grooms and gamekeepers, were with the young squire,

"You see I had no knack of attracting hearts. Of course all this roused an antagonism in me; all that my young brother excelled in I avoided. I could back any horse in my father's stable, but I disdained to ride; my eye was keen, my hand was steady, but I despised mere game-keepers' accomplishments; what was the highest skill infencing or wrestling to one who in the solemn night watches tried a bout with the arch-enemy of mankind and came off victorious? The gulf yawned wider and wider, though silently, between my relatives and myself. Then I elected to go into the house of Foster & Co. By this time Lady Mary, my beautiful step-mother, had been in her grave more than two years, and Guy had entered the army and had gone on active service."

"Who?" asked Marie faintly.

"Guy, my half-brother," returned Mr. Watson, absorbed in his reminiscences and not heeding her wide-opened, terrified eyes. "I think my father paid his debts before he died, and I think Guy cleared himself once or twice after; at any rate, he got rid of his small patrimony before he was thirty-three. We scarcely ever saw each other after my father's death. I confess few men have ever been so disagreeable to me as my father's son; his indescribable lordly scorn, his absorption in mere physical pleasure, his delight in brutal sports, his utter incapacity for spiritual

life! if ever man was born without a soul, that man is Guy Neville!"

"How dare you say so," said Marie sternly but calmly; "has God given you insight to know what is His, and what is not, in a human heart? Take care how you mistake personal dislike for supernatural insight!"

"I am perhaps justly rebuked," returned Mr. Watson, after a pause of astonishment. "But if you knew the man's life, the sums he has squandered at play, the chances he has lost, the recklessness of a career that has been peculiarly offensive to me, you would understand how hard it is to forgive—"

"Until seventy times seven," interrupted Marie, in a low expressive tone, full of tender suggestion.

"Well, hear the sequel. About five months ago, I had a short, proud application for help from this half brother of mine. It was couched in language almost offensive, conceived in so unchastened a spirit, that I at once determined to reject it. About this time Guy and his friend Sir Frederic Compton became acquainted with a ward of Mr. Foster's (Sir Frederic is Mr. Foster's grandson), and my old friend particularly wished to make a marriage between Sir Frederic and his ward. It seems that as she had a large fortune, which Compton did not want, the comrades agreed that the 'loot' should fall to Guy's

share, and accordingly he laid himself out to catch the heiress; but by some jugglery, which I do not understand, my half-brother mistook a French governess in the same school with Mr. Foster's ward, for the New Orleans heiress, and under that impression ran away with her! Probably the French girl thought she had caught a prize; at any rate, the truth came out at Dover, where they had gone after the ceremony. I imagine Guy was in a state of fury when he discovered the truth, for he is as proud as Lucifer; and to find that he was tied to a penniless nobody must have been, as he would say himself, 'hard lines.' At any rate, the girl took fright and ran away; and Guy came to me like a madman. I was, I confess, sorry for him; it was such an awful disappointment. However, he was determined on the only proper course left for him under the circumstances—to discover the girl who was certainly his wife, and take her for better, for worse. He was evidently much to blame, and ought to bear it; but how far the young lady was responsible for the mistake it was impossible to say. It is an uncomfortable position for my brother; I ventured to admonish him, and was proceeding to give him some counsel, when he broke from me in a fury, and rushed away in a wild search for this unhappy girl. I scarcely know which will be the greatest misfortune—to find or to lose her. So long as

he is ignorant of her whereabouts he is tied to a myth, a shadow, and can contract no other alliance; if he discovers her, he has an incumbrance the more in a low-bred wife, possibly an adventuress. However, I feel, especially since we spoke of the law of love which permeates Christianity, that I have been somewhat harsh with my brother; I have therefore desired Mr. Wilkins to write to him to Paris, where it is supposed he is at present, requesting him to come to me. We must see what can be done; if this unlucky marriage can be broken through, or if it should be carried out. In any case I hope to act in a Christian spirit a more brotherly part!" He ceased and closed his eyes.

Marie could not command her voice for some moments; her whole destiny seemed to lie before her, and yet she was powerless to influence it! She was paralyzed; she felt the moment had come to announce herself, and yet she could not do it. The crisis had come and she had lost her opportunity. At length, with pale and trembling lips, she, with a painful effort, uttered the words, "And your brother? would he, too, wish to be free from this unfortunate girl, who seems to be more sinned against than sinning."

"I cannot tell," said Mr. Watson wearily; "whatever Guy Neville may have said or done in the excitement of such a crushing blow, he will always act like a gentleman, as the jargon

of the world goes. He will stand to his word, and stick to the woman who has a right to his name, whatever it may cost him; but he was too disturbed and angry when we met to permit me to judge. He is quite capable of a strong passion, but of that higher love which seeks the temporal and eternal welfare of the beloved one I should say he knew nothing."

"Ah! how can you tell? You say he seeks her, this unhappy girl? Perhaps, then, he does love her."

"He is bound for his own sake to find her."

"For his own sake! Oh, Mr. Watson, imagine what she must suffer if she loves him! conscious of being a misfortune and an incumbrance, innocent of any wrong, perhaps, and yet blighted, desolate!"

"If she is such a woman, her lot is cruel; but the French governess is generally case and world hardened. Possibly she thought it a good chance of settling herself for life; she could not dream the condition of Guy's finances."

"Dear sir," exclaimed Marie, with sudden decision, "you have excited yourself; you have talked too much. Pray sleep; I will call your man to stay by you a while. I have letters of some importance to write, and must leave you."

So spoke Marie, hurriedly, breathlessly; she felt she must run away and be alone, that she must cover up her face and press her hands upon

her lips or she would scream aloud in her agony. How was she to bear it! this terrible conviction that Guy sought her solely from a sense of honor, from a necessity of his standing as a gentleman. And if he found her, should she be obliged to be his wife, to undergo the terrible humiliation of being a wife on sufferance, married by mistake.. Would God or man exact so bitter a forfeit for an involuntary offence? At one moment she was resolved to keep her incognita and defy Guy Neville to discover her, or, discovering her, to force her to submit to be his wife, merely to save the wound to his honor, to wipe out the blot on his scutcheon. Never had she felt so bitter, so at war with society and even Mr. Watson. How little could he understand her peculiar trials, her agonizing position! His close relationship to Guy seemed to unfit him for the task of consoler and counsellor. Where could she turn? Then the memory of Mr. Watson's bitter words and unfriendly tone respecting his brother came back to complete her dissatisfaction with her benefactor. How little he knew or appreciated Guy Neville! How little he knew of the delicate tenderness which was hidden under his proud, cold exterior! A hundred minute instances came back to her, as she recalled the brief hours they had spent together as man and wife. Could these moments never come back? Was it possible they were to

be strangers evermore? What was the wisest, justest course to pursue? Who could tell her, who could guide her?

She passed a terrible afternoon, and was obliged to plead a headache to avoid the ordeal of returning to Mr. Watson, which brought upon her many visits and inquiries from the nurse, and an excruciating cross-examination on the part of the matron.

The following day Marie struggled, she scarce knew how, through her morning classes, and returned to go through a semblance of eating her early dinner, which was shared by the matron and nurse.

"I am sure," said the latter, "it is well that Mr. Watson has a sound, untried 'constitootion,' or all this excitement would go hard with him—first one thing and then another. The only one I like to leave him with is you, Miss Thibaut; he is always as quiet and peaceful as a lamb when you have been reading to him. But he is getting on; only, they ought not to be in a hurry to move him."

"Who wants to move him?" asked Marie wearily.

"Why, his brother, that is up there with him now—a very fine man and a grand gentleman."

"His brother!" gasped Marie. "When did he come?"

"Oh, about half an hour ago, or less! He has been away on the Continent, I believe, and only arrived in town this morning; I was just giving Mr. Watson his beef tea when he came in, and I was ordered off pretty sharp."

Marie was stunned; the danger of deliverance had, then, come so near her. A few minutes earlier, in her return from the class, and she would have met Guy face to face. Even now she feared to go up to her own room, lest she should encounter him. She dreaded to stay in, lest she should be asked for; or to go out, lest she should be seen. At length, collecting her forces, she remembered that Mr. Watson's room looked out on a dreary garden, and that the roadway was therefore safe, and as she had laid aside her hat and mantle in the matron's room she could escape unseen; she would slip out, and take refuge with Mrs. Bushel, who would be only too delighted to receive her. There she would be safe, and could remain for some hours.

"I suppose Captain Neville will not stay very long?" she asked in an unsteady voice. "I do not know, I am sure. The doctor is to be here at three, and very likely he will wait to see him. So Mr. Roberts (the valet) says; but I am sure, if he stays talking all that time to my patient, we will have him in a high fever again."

"Then, as you are not likely to want me, I

shall take the opportunity of going out a little way ; for I do not feel my headache of yesterday quite gone," said Marie, putting away her plate.

"And if you starve yourself, you will never gather any strength," observed the matron severely.

Marie could only smile in reply ; words would not come in reply, and as soon as she could she rose from table, put on her walking things, and slipped out, her trembling limbs almost refusing to bear her. To her relief Mrs. Bushel was out, but "Jemimar" readily gave her permission to sit in the little downstairs parlor in silence and safety.

Meantime the meeting between the brothers was of an unusually amiable character.

Mr. Watson was struck by the stern, sombre expression of Captain Neville's face. It gave the impression of a man who had left hope behind ; his large frame looked gaunt ; his clothes hung loosely upon him ; his cheek looked hollow. "Glad to find you so much better," said Guy, taking the hand feebly held out to him.

"Thank you for coming so quickly at my summons," returned Mr. Watson, "It shows more friendliness than I expected."

"I should always have been ready to come if you wished it, but, unless you sent for me, I

could never suppose my presence in any way necessary." There was a short pause; and Captain Neville inquired how the accident occurred, and received a short explanation.

"You had a narrow shave of it," he remarked; "but you are coming round; when shall you be able to leave this?"

"Not for another fortnight; indeed, I am in no hurry to go. The place looks rough, but I am comfortable, and admirably cared for."

"This is one of your philanthropic undertakings, eh?" said Guy; but his tone was perfectly inoffensive. "By George, you spend your money rather differently from the way in which I got rid of mine; yet I suppose you get as much pleasure out of it as I did."

"I might get more if—" Mr. Watson paused. "I have been somewhat hard, Guy, but you have never been conciliating! Might we not do better in future? My bodily weakness, my physical suffering, seem to have given me a clearer view of things."

"And my mental suffering, the crushing weight that hangs over me, seems to have taken the color out of my life and left me neither hope nor energy," returned Guy. "*You* will come all right in a few weeks, but *I* am in all senses a ruined man; still if I could find my wife, and make it right with her, for I feel awfully to blame in the matter, I think I could put my

shoulder to the wheel, and work for my living—”

“Then you have no trace of her?”

“None; it seems strange that the police should be at fault, but they are. A horrible dread sometimes presses on me that she may be dead, seized with fever perhaps, the result of distress, of her anguish of mind, and, alone without money, she may have breathed her last in a hospital, unknown and uncared for. By Heaven! I am sometimes on the verge of madness when I think of it.”

“Then you are sure she did not intentionally deceive you?”

“Certain! she was as sweet and simple and pure a creature as though she had been brought up in an English country home. It was my hasty tongue, my brutal bad temper, that suggested the base suspicion, the infernal words that stung her into desperation. It is now four months since I began this search, and I seem as far off as ever.”

“It is a cruel position,” said Mr. Watson with an amount of sympathy, which a short time back he could not have given. “Do not lose heart; we must make fresh and more strenuous efforts. Meantime, I beg you will take up your abode in my house; you will be very welcome; and as I am laid up here, why, our mutual peculiarities will not clash.”

"Thank you," said Captain Neville shortly, and then added: "I fear we have been unjust to each other. I am glad, deuced glad, by George! to have your help, and what the women call sympathy. But I am probably outstaying my time; I suppose you ought not to talk too much."

"I am quite equal to hear an exposition of your affairs if you chose to tell them. If you are in earnest in your desire to work, to build up your fortunes, I am not indisposed to help you."

Instead of flying out about interference and prying, as Guy Neville would probably have done a year ago, he went very clearly into his present position, and showed that if he had but a trifle left, he had at least managed to clear himself from debt by the sale of his commission. The conversation again turned on the lost bride, but Neville was reticent as regarded his feelings towards her; it was too sore a subject, moreover. Though surprised to find himself conversing for nearly an hour with his brother, without any rupture of their unusually friendly tone, he was nevertheless not disposed to dwell upon his tenderer emotions, nor display his wounds to so critical an eye.

"Suppose, then," asked the elder, as Neville rose to depart, "suppose you discover this poor girl, what would you wish? to take her as your wife *de facto*? or to break your marriage? for

I suppose such a mere ceremony could be set aside?"

"I should be entirely guided by her wishes in the matter," returned Guy, rather stiffly; "she has the right to choose."

"She has, no doubt," said Mr. Watson imagining that Guy was influenced by a simple sense of justice, and little thinking the passion and tenderness that were hidden in his heart. "Well, Guy, I trust you will put up at my house. Pray, ring the bell for me."

"Thank you," replied Captain Neville, with some hesitation. "As you put it in so friendly a fashion, I will accept your offer."

"Do so," said Mr. Watson. "Roberts," he continued, as his man entered in obedience to his summons, "I want you to go over to Eccleston Square, and let Mrs. Johnson know that Captain Neville is going to make some stay there, and to arrange accordingly. I require nothing more this afternoon, you can go at once. Is Miss Thibaut in the house? If disengaged, I should like her to read to me when Captain Neville leaves."

"I will inquire, sir," said the sedate diplomatic-looking valet, who left the room.

Meantime, the brothers parted, with more of mutual comprehension and good will than they had ever known before. The one was softened and disposed to universal kindness by the delicious, indescribable warmth which had

sprung up in his heart towards one gentle, humble, yet puzzling child, as she was compared to him, and thence permeated every thought and every impulse. The other, crushed and beaten to the ground by the sense of defeat, by the terrible consciousness, that on him lay the guilt of perhaps ruining an innocent, blameless life, through his selfish schemes and culpable want of self-restraint.

Roberts returned to say that Miss Thibaut was not in the house, and then departed on his master's errand, leaving that gentleman in a condition of irritable discontent, very discomfiting to nurse, who put it all down to the excitement of seeing his brother.

It was quite dusk when Marie stole back to the institution, too worn out with anxiety and emotion to know clearly what she was about. She went to visit Mr. Watson, who was too tired to speak much; she answered his few questions; she smiled a mechanical smile when he said significantly that he had had a friendly interview with his brother, and that her (Marie's) doctrines had not been preached to him in vain. Then she read to him, so mechanically, with so much unconscious pathos in the voice, which was evidently tuned to some strain of sadness he did not recognize, that at length he dismissed her with a kindly word, "Poor child, you have been doing too much; go, go to rest; to-morrow we will talk of many things."

CHAPTER XXX.

A DAY elapsed, during which nothing was heard or seen of Captain Neville. Marie endured a martyrdom of doubt, uncertainty, and despair during those long yet swift hours since his sudden paralyzing appearance. She felt that the moment for action had come; yet how to act she could not tell.

Mr. Watson's afternoon had been taken up by a longer visit than usual from the great surgeon, who declared his patient to be going on remarkably well, as also, by an interview with his confidential clerk. It was therefore dusk before Marie received the dreaded summons to the sick man's room.

Nurse was lighting the lamp and arranging the shade, when Marie entered and wished the patient good evening, asking at the same time how he felt.

"Unusually well, thank God!" he returned. "I see that Sir James is surprised at my progress. In fact, I imagine I shall rise renewed from this sick bed."

"I trust so," said Marie softly.

"Nevertheless, sir," said nurse, preparing to

leave the room,—“I would not make too bold—don’t you try to listen too hard. If you feel inclined to drop off to sleep while Miss Thibaut reads, just you give into it.”

“That is exactly what I do not feel inclined to do,” observed Mr. Watson, with a pleasant smile, as the door closed behind the speaker. “Neither to listen nor to sleep.”

“I hope you are not feeling feverish,” said Marie, as she sought for the big book on “Daniel.”

“No! rather something of the deliciousness of returning health. I have much to thank God for,” he continued; “many unexpected mercies to acknowledge; and you are right! Mercy is indeed twice blessed. I am wonderfully relieved by being at peace with my brother, but a little surprised that he has not been here to-day.”

Marie could not command her voice to reply. Ought she not now to reveal all to her benefactor? She ought, she must; but how to begin, how to find words? how to excuse herself for her reserve, her want of confidence in her excellent, her only friend? Mr. Watson talked on with unusual cheerfulness, diverging from the subject of his brother to many others connected with his plans, benevolent and personal; and still Marie, only half hearing what he said, sought in vain for the words which would not come. At length, overwhelmed by the sense of a terrible crisis impending over her, in which

she would be utterly helpless, a long quivering sigh escaped her.

It struck an attentive ear. Mr. Watson paused, and turning his head on the pillow, looked earnestly at her. "Marie," he said suddenly imperiously, "take away the shade from the lamp." She mechanically obeyed.

"Marie, child," he exclaimed huskily, as the full light fell upon her, "what evil has befallen you? You have gone through some sore trial since I saw you yesterday. Come here!" he continued, holding out his thin, bony hand. "Tell me your griefs, Marie; trust me! I will judge you differently now that I know you—know your nature as perhaps you scarce know yourself, from what I should have done a few months past; speak to me."

"I cannot," said Marie in a despairing tone, while she put her cold hand into his, and stood motionless beside him. "I cannot; yet there is nothing left for me but to tell you all, and the words won't come."

"Marie," still in a voice hoarse with emotion, "if you knew all I feel for you, you would not hesitate to confide everything to me; for I can forgive you everything. Ah! Marie, had such a woman as you crossed my path in youth, how different my life would have been! You have opened a new world of hope, of religion, of possible joy to me. I may be foolish, mad, and yet,

Marie, I have that trust in you, that need of you, which urges me to risk all." He drew her gently to him, while she gazed at him with eyes suddenly dilated by a new unexpected terror. "Marie, child,"—and the strong harsh face softened and lit up with a wonderful glow—"I ought perhaps to have only a father's tenderness for one so fair and young, but I have more, dear, more passionate, more—"

"Hush for heaven's sake, hush," cried Marie, a great horror loosing her tongue. "You must not speak it." She sank on her knees beside him, and pressing her brow on the hand that held hers, whispered rapidly but most emphatically, "I am your brother's wife!"

There was a dead silence. Marie felt the grasp on her hand tighten till she could scarcely bear it, and then suddenly relax.

She slowly rose from her knees, and with a beating heart ventured to look at—her brother-in-law.

He was ghastly pale, and had "turned his face to the wall." Marie feared for one agonized moment that he was dead. The next, she saw his white lips move, as if in silent prayer. Then he slowly turned to her again, and lifting his eyes—oh, what caverns of hopeless gloom they looked! He said in a deep hollow tone:

"Tell me all; we have the future to think of, and evil tongues to guard against." He paused,

closed his eyes; and Marie feared he had fainted.

"I have killed you!" she whispered, overruled by the fear of calling in any witness to this trying scene. "I who would give my life for you!"

He raised his hand a moment with a stern warning gesture, and then it fell helplessly on the coverlet; and he articulated feebly, "Wine, wine."

Marie flew to administer it, and then he seemed to rally a little. "The opportunity is not to be lost," he said, making a strong effort over himself. "We are alone; give me your version of this strange story." And Marie, gathering force as she proceeded, began brokenly to give the details of her unhappy history. At the end she dwelt vehemently on the cruel humiliation of being married by mistake, of being reproached with deception, and earnestly implored her listener to save her from the sad fate of being returned on the hands of a husband whose fortunes she had innocently been the means of ruining.

"And you! must I lose you too?" she sobbed at the end of her story. "Can you ever, ever forgive the species of deceit I have practised upon you? Oh, if you knew the shame and shrinking that held me silent, the impossibility of confessing that I had been taken up and thrown aside! that I had fled from a husband who did not want me! If you knew all the bitterness, the despair

that have oppressed me, you would not cast me from you!"

"You have erred, sorely erred in not telling me all at first," he returned with deep gravity. "You must see yourself how much would thereby have been saved. Yet trust me still. I will not forsake you." His voice shook, and he resumed after a moment's pause, "You, too, have been sorely sinned against; we must try and repair the past."

"But, dear Mr. Watson, kindest, truest friend, you will not force me to return to Guy! you will not force him from mistaken ideas of justice to take me back; help us rather to break the slender bond that links us."

"You do not know what you say, child," turning a stern and searching glance upon her. "Do you then no longer love this man—your husband?"

"I could—I do!" cried Marie, clasping her poor trembling hands. "He drew my heart to him from the first, and though I feel at times thrills of indignation against him for the wrong he did me in thought, I never can cease to regret him. It is this that would make life insupportable with him, when—when he did not want me."

A low moan broke from her hearer's lips.

"Leave me," he said; "I must be alone."

"But is it well, or safe—"

"I must be alone," he repeated with almost fierce resolution. Then he held out his hand again, and Marie, clasping it in both hers, kissed it reverently.

"Poor lonely child," he murmured brokenly; "have faith—have hope! I will be your friend always. Go! to-morrow—to-morrow we will plan. Now leave me; I want to be alone with God."

And Marie stole noiselessly away, her head bent, her breath hushed by that vague indescribable awe which few can resist when they see another visibly impressed by some unseen spiritual presence.

Marie, though shaken to the depths of her being by this trying scene, could hardly believe in the sense of relief she experienced now that all had been confessed. She cared little for any other opinion save that of her friend and benefactor, and now that he knew her in her true colors and did not reject her, she felt a fresh strength.

He was so good—so strong—that he would soon surmount the strange weakness he had so nearly confessed. In recalling it she wept long, and thought of the stern face all soft and glowing in his affection for herself with warmest, tenderest sympathy. She felt how grand and noble a nature lay imprisoned in the rugged form that shivered at her touch, and she wished

in purest innocence for all their sakes that she had met him first, for she felt she could have loved him.

Yet was there not a shadow of infidelity towards Guy in all this regretful tenderness? Ah, no! how her heart leaped at the idea of meeting him once more even to say good by forever, of once more gladdening her eyes with the sight of the form and face which to her had been the worthiest dwelling-place for a chivalrous spirit!

And yet that knightly-looking soldier had stolen her in mistake for the sake of the money he thought she possessed, and dared to insult her with the accusation of an imposition base as it was barefaced. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us!"

With this prayer upon her lips she sank at last to sleep, only to be roused in a few hours by the nurse with the startling news that Mr. Watson was in a raging fever.

"So you had better get up, Miss; I see I shall want all the help I can get. He will be trying to get out of bed next. We have sent off for the doctor. This comes of brothers and business, before a man has half got over such a smash up as he has had. I knew how it would be; and he was going on so beautiful only no one would heed me. Here! here's your dressing gown. Come along, do."

For twenty-four hours the terrible fever and delirium held the newly-recovered patient in their burning grasp. The doctor, nurse, and surgeon were all equally puzzled, as hitherto he had made such satisfactory progress. "Some family quarrel is probably at the bottom of all this excitement," observed the surgeon to the doctor. "He talks continually of his brother, and calls on him to do justice and make atonement. Then his religious craze is a very dangerous element in his condition. The nurse tells me he raved much of some awful deadly sin for which there was no forgiveness. Still he is certainly calmer and stronger this evening. I think he will pull through."

And he did. The second night after Marie's avowal, towards daybreak, he fell into a quiet sleep, which she watched in a state of mind almost indescribable, counting the moments as they slowly dropped away into that great gulf "the past," scarce daring to hope, knowing but too well the reason of the patient's relapse, and why his last state was so much worse than the first, feeling that if, indeed, he succumbed, it would have been her want of truth and candor that killed him. How could she endure life if this misfortune befell her? But God was merciful to her youth,—her innocence,—and as she watched and prayed, Watson slumbered.

Every quarter of an hour's quiet was so much gained against despair. At last the first cold, blue-gray light began to steal through the chinks of the shutters. An hour—two hours—three—had passed, and still he slept, while new life and hope began to dawn in Marie's heart with the dawning day.

"He sleeps still," she whispered to the nurse, who came to relieve her at seven.

"Well, I do declare! I begin to believe he will get through after all. He must be very strong. Has he been quiet all the time?"

"At first he moaned and muttered, but gradually grew quieter. He has had quite four hours' sleep."

"Well, you had better go and get some rest now."

"Indeed I do not want it!" returned Marie earnestly. "I can stay till you have had your breakfast; I am so anxious to see how he will awake."

"Well, if you are sure it will not be too much for you," etc., etc.; and the nurse not unwillingly retired.

Still the sleeper slept on tranquilly, his breathing quiet and regular, the very pose of his hand, as it lay on the coverlet, indicated relaxation and repose. Still Marie sat motionless, unemployed, dawning hope dispersing the thick blackness that had settled down over her heart,

her mind ; now other thoughts began to suggest themselves.

What had become of Guy? When would he reappear? He might come to-morrow—to-day—in an hour or two—and then—a glance would tell her what her future would be,—either full of love and light joy, or the blackness of darkness forever. The one supreme evil from which she prayed to be delivered was the horror of being reluctantly received and compelled to take the position of an unloved wife.

Mr. Watson's second recovery dated from that refreshing sleep, but the wild excitement of fever was succeeded by extreme weakness and a gloomy silence almost unbroken.

Marie was afraid to go near him, and he did not appear to have asked for her ; yet she longed to be "friends with him again," as she called it in her school-girl phraseology. She stole at intervals into his room to learn how he was and to help nurse, but she instinctively kept out of his sight.

She was most restless and uneasy. If Mr. Watson turned against her, what was she to do? In this mood the effort to teach, to keep order, was almost beyond her strength ; she had a terrible hysterical feeling at times that she must scream aloud in her agony, and give up all attempt at seeming. Yet again her native good

sense, the quiet force of her character, enabled her to rally and keep fast hold of her self-control.

The day but one after Mr. Watson had taken a turn for the better—and days are ages in a condition of mind, and under circumstances such as Marie's—she encountered Roberts, Mr. Watson's man, in the entrance-hall on her return from the school-room. "How does Mr. Watson seem to-day?" she asked.

"He is going on nicely, Miss," returned Roberts, a very steady, respectable individual, who had seemed from the first to recognize something superior in Marie. "The doctor thinks he may see Mr. Wilkins to-day. I am sure I hope so, for these letters ought to be seen to. Most are marked private;" and he showed several which he held on a small waiter. On the very top lay one, the writing and superscription whereof made Marie turn red and pale, and thrill through all her veins, as she remembered how often she had hesitated and trembled to open missives written in the same hand and addressed to herself. There was no mistaking Guy Neville's big, bold caligraphy. She could even read mental disturbance in the hasty "Private" with a thick, crooked dash under it, which was scrawled across the top.

"Are you going in, Miss?" continued Roberts. "The doctor seemed to think Mr. Watson might be the better of being read to."

"I will go ; I will ask nurse," returned Marie, her eyes filling at his words. Never again would she read to him out of that dreary book or argue about religion. Perhaps he would not suffer her near him. Oh for a Daniel to lift the thick black that hung before her future !

She resolved, however, to take courage and make the first dreadful effort to ascertain how she stood with her good, her dear friend.

"I am sure I am glad you have come, Miss Thibaut," whispered the nurse. "He has been slightly restless, and looking about ; I think he wants *you*. You'll take my place a bit, won't you ? though you look as if you ought to be in the doctor's hands yourself."

"I am only tired," said Marie with a wan little smile. "The school-room was oppressive ; I will stay with pleasure. It is time for his beef-tea, is it not ?"

"It is ; and here is Mr. Roberts with it."

Marie took the cup, and waited an instant till the nurse had gone, and she was alone with the sufferer. Then she softly drew near the bed, and met the deep, dark eyes, which were raised with a wistful expression of waiting, of weariness, to hers. Marie could not speak. She stood an instant mute and still, the cup in her hand ; and then her anxiety on one head was suddenly completely relieved ; for a smile so

kind, so tender, so bright, spread over the sufferer's face, that Marie knew she was forgiven, that she was re-adopted, and even, better still, that her benefactor had fought the good fight, and routed the flesh and the devil. Nevertheless she feared to disturb him by uttering a word. She ventured to stroke the hand next her gently ; and then she held the cup to him, and helped him to eat its contents. When he had quite finished he murmured very low, "I thank you," and watched her with an anxious look as she moved to a table at the other side of the room, an expression of content replacing it, as she returned to her old seat by the bedside. Then he said very weakly, "Has not my brother returned?"

"No, dear Mr. Watson."

"I am greatly surprised. Marie!"

"Yes."

"He must be sent for. You must be united ; it will be the best for you, for him—certainly for him."

"Do not disturb yourself," said Marie persuasively. "I am so grateful to you for your forgiveness, for the interest you still show in me, that I promise to be guided by you—to do whatever you bid me. Does that content you?"

"Yes, so far as you are concerned—But Guy ; where can he be ? I am much disturbed about Guy."

Marie hesitated. Should she tell him there was a letter in Roberts' hands, which might explain Guy's absence? She longed to read it herself; but would it harm her—brother-in-law? Even while she hesitated, some force within her, though scarce of her, made her say, always quietly, "I saw a letter addressed to you in—in Captain Neville's writing with Roberts just now."

"Ring," exclaimed Mr. Watson, in louder, firmer accents than he had yet used. "Ring twice for Roberts."

Marie mechanically obeyed. "I trust I have not done wrong in telling you this," she said timidly.

"You have done well and wisely," he returned. "I should have soon been in a fever for want of intelligence respecting him. Roberts," as the man entered and approached him, "bring me my letters."

The man hesitated and looked at Marie.

"Do as I tell you," resumed his master imperiously. "I only want one of them, but I must select it myself."

Roberts with evident reluctance went away in obedience to orders, and quickly returned with a small pile; these Mr. Watson turned over with his feeble hands, and soon selected his brother's from the other letters. "You may go, Roberts. Miss Thibaut will read this to me."

"Perhaps I had better not," said Marie, as soon as they were alone, and shrinking from the task. "Most probably Captain Neville would not like me to see it; there is no knowing what it may contain."

"You have a right to read your husband's letters," returned Mr. Watson, with a touch of his old grimness; "and I do not think it will contain anything to wound you; at any rate I must know its contents, and I do not choose either nurse or Roberts to read it."

Thus exhorted and commanded, Marie opened the envelope with a trembling heart, an odd, faint feeling of terror oppressing her. It was dated four days back and was as follows:—

"DEAR JOHN,

"On my return from seeing you I found some information awaiting me, which compels me to start for Southampton, as I believe I may there find some clue to the object of my search. I regret much not being able to see you again, as it may be some days before I return to town. I may possibly have to visit the Channel Islands. But, as we agreed, my first duty as a man of honor is to discover and reinstate the unhappy girl, whose ignorance of the world may lead her into some painful and difficult position. I trust I shall find you nearly well on my return, and

will come to you directly I arrive. As to myself, I have little hope of anything.

“Yours truly,

“GUY NEVILLE.”

Marie's voice nearly broke down as she uttered the name so dear and so familiar. What was she to gather from this letter? There was no word of love or tenderness in it—only a sense of duty, of honor. He had little hope of anything. Was his life, then, blighted? and whether he found her or not, would it be equally devoid of color and of light? Very bitter was the wave of thought that slowly stirred the convolutions of her brain; but she kept silence; she must not vex or contradict the man whom she had already cost so dear.

Meantime Mr. Watson, after a moment's thought, exclaimed: “And there is no address where I could telegraph? I must send and ascertain what they know about him at his hotel.”

“Do you indeed think of sending for him, dear Mr. Watson,” cried Marie, unable to suppress her terror. “Oh, stop! Think of how terrible it would be to condemn us both to life-long unhappiness! Tell me, would it not be possible—would it not be better to help us to break the very slight bond that links us, and set

your brother free to make a fresh career for himself, unhampered by a wife he does not, cannot love?"

"How do you know that?" asked Mr. Watson, looking keenly at her.

"I feel it," said Marie, unconscious of the big tears that welled up and slowly rolled down her cheek. "And you, too; can you not read—can you not see by this letter that duty, honor, a sense of what he owes to his name, his character, urges this search for me? I daresay were we forced together again he would not be rude or cruel; but oh! he would kill me with kindly indifference and well-bred tolerance. Ah! if you are my friend—if you ever cared for me—spare me the misery of such a fate."

"Marie," he returned slowly, feebly, "you excite yourself too much. I believe it to be not only your bounden duty, but your best chance of happiness to live together. You love this man; I see it in the vehemence with which you seek to avoid him; and he—oh! could he live with you, Marie, and *not* love you—you so fair and good! And he did fall in love, as it is called, after his fashion, with you. He spoke unadvisedly, but I think he repents it heartily."

"Pray do not speak too much," implored Marie, half distracted. "I fear I am unlucky to both of you. I will indeed strive to be wise, and—"

"Words cost me less than silence at such a moment as this," interrupted Mr. Watson impressively. "Listen to me, Marie. You have both done wrong, Guy especially. It was wrong to entice a young and, as he thought, wealthy girl from her legal protectors; he has been well punished. It was wrong in you to listen to the persuasions of a stranger, and risk everything on the chance of his proving a good man and true."

"But," urged poor Marie, with pathetic humility, "there was no one in the world to care about me—no dear mother or loving father! no brother, no sister! Oh! it was so delightful to be loved—and I thought he loved me so much! Do not judge me too harshly."

"I do not, Marie; but you and Guy having done wrong must atone; you must not make further and worse scandal; you must rather help each other to lead worthier lives; and remember, Marie, you are not now friendless and alone. Your hand, Marie." He paused, and added solemnly: "*I will be your brother; I promise it—before God.*"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE result of this conversation was a certain increased sense of security to Marie. The promise so freely and solemnly given by Mr. Watson to be a brother to her was comforting. Yet her fate still hung in the balance. It might be the happiest—it might be the most miserable.

Of one thing she felt sure, that both herself and Guy were in the grasp of no ordinary man, whose strong will and deep convictions were backed by the possession of the actual means of power—money. Only she prayed that he would not bring too much of his potent influence to bear on Captain Neville—that he would leave him to his own impulses. Then she thought over and over again all the marks of love and tenderness which her husband had lavished on her, trembling with subtle pleasure as she thought, but ever chilled and sorrow-stricken by the awful chasm which had swallowed up her joy, and still yawned black and fathomless as it had been when first opened by Guy's cruel words: "By Heaven! you have deceived me!" Could he ever surmount this impression? Could she ever forgive it?

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She had no further private conversation with Mr. Watson that day. He sent for her later, and asked her to read some passages from the Psalms and the gospel of St. John, which seemed to give him great pleasure. He lay profoundly still, with his eyes closed, an expression of perfect peace softening and beautifying his rugged face.

The next morning Mr. Wilkins, the confidential clerk, drove up in a hansom, and was admitted.

After half an hour's interview he left the house with an air of haste and preoccupation, and jumped into the cab, which had waited for him, and which disappeared at a rapid pace.

Such was nurse's report when Marie returned after her morning's work—told, too, with much ominous head-shaking and prophecies of evil results, if a sufferer like "the poor gentleman lying there" was allowed to rack his brains with business. "Couldn't he let money-making alone for a month or two? Was all the wealth of the world comparable to health and strength?" etc., etc., etc.

The matron, too, had her revelation to make. Mr. Watson had sent for her, and spoke to her "that kind and considerate, she was ready to cry," and directed her to engage the teacher who took the afternoon classes to take the morning work also, as "you would have to leave

soon, having come into property or met with a surprise as far as I can understand; and I am sure, Miss, there never was a young lady deserved it more."

There was an indefinable change in the woman's tone, a sort of respect which struck Marie's attention. Was Mr. Watson preparing the way for her to take the position of his sister-in-law?

"I have spoken to Mrs. Roper," said Mr. Watson the same evening as Marie was bidding him good-night, "to arrange matters so that you need not again visit the school."

"But, my dear Mr. Watson," Marie was beginning to urge, when he silenced her by saying, gently but most decidedly, "You must leave yourself in my hands, Marie, at all events for the present. The final question you and my brother must decide between you, but the minor matters you will leave to me. You must never resume your position here."

"Yet I have been as happy in my work—in your employment—as I could have been under my circumstances," said Marie; "and as I may very probably have always to work for my living, teaching is my natural *métier*."

"I can do better for you than here," murmured Mr. Watson. "Even if—but good-night; let to-morrow take heed for the things of itself."

Marie left him, in a measure comforted, yet full of a fearful looking-for of judgment.

The following morning seemed strangely long and unemployed to Marie. Mr. Watson did not send for her, and she felt too restless to sit down either to read or work. She therefore applied herself to turn out and re-arrange her drawers and cupboards. She gave her long, thick hair an extra brushing, and did some neglected mending; then she put fresh lace in her simple black cashmere dress, and stood awhile before the glass, thinking how thin and pale she looked, and that surely her eyes used not to be so big or her mouth so sad. Then she took out her little money box and counted her small savings. A quarter's salary was just due, so she was not quite penniless. How she wondered what was to become of her!

A knock at the door startled her.

"If you please," said nurse, coming in, "Mr. Wilkins says, would you mind coming down to Mrs. Roper's sitting-room for a few minutes?"

"Mr. Wilkins!" exclaimed Marie, opening her eyes. "What can he want with me?"

"I don't know, Miss," said the nurse, who turned and went downstairs quickly.

Marie followed more slowly, and found the matron's little sitting-room untenanted save by Peter, the big black and gray cat, which lay

curled up in Mrs. Roper's favorite straw chair, the only comfortable seat in the apartment. She closed the door, and looked round with that curious, half-unconscious, yet keen observation of outside and indifferent things which comes to the brain in moments of great excitement or tension; and Marie's heart was beating with expectation and fear as to what this interview with Mr. Wilkins would bring forth. She noticed the painful cleanliness and rectangularity of the room—the cane chairs; the slippery horsehair-covered sofa; a few photographs of celebrated preachers and members of the matron's family which hung at either side of the chimney; the mantelshelf with its Swiss clock and ill-shaped china vases; the round table covered with a dreadful red and green cloth; Mrs. Roper's work-basket; a big black Bible, and a small volume of "Meditations," which lay on it; the rather skimpy, red moreen curtains drawn tightly back; the light-colored mahogany chiffonier, decorated by a fair supply of tumblers and wine-glasses carefully turned upside down, a large glass dish upon a bead mat occupying the centre. "How horrible always to sit in a room like this or—"

The sound of a step approaching—a rapid, firm tread—made her hold her breath to listen. The door was opened with a sudden hasty thrust, and Guy Neville stood before her!

Guy! but Guy so gaunt, with such a worn, haggard look on his strong features that Marie saw at a glance she had not been the only sufferer.

"Marie!" he cried, advancing a step or two impetuously and then stopping; for Marie, for the moment more overwhelmed and frightened than delighted, turned deadly pale, and visibly shrank back.

"Marie! Great Heavens! you fear—you dread me! Have I lost you? Are you implacable?"

He stood where he had paused, while his sombre, sunken eyes devoured her.

"Oh! no, no! not implacable," cried Marie, clasping her hands, and feeling scarce able to articulate; "only—indeed I was—I am sorry for your great disappointment, and I am quite ready to set you free. I would have helped you to escape at first, only I did not know how; so I thought I would just keep away. It was wrong; Mr. Watson, your brother, says so. Now, Captain Neville, do not let us make any mistake, you and I; our whole future depends on our decision. Do not be deceived by any false notion of honor. I will not bear being tolerated." As Marie spoke she unconsciously pressed herself against the projection of the chimney in unmistakable nervous dread, like a wild fawn trapped and eager to escape.

"You shrink from me—I see it,"—cried Neville. "Perhaps I ought not to be surprised. Do not fear. I will never force myself upon you; *you* shall be free if you wish it. Do not suppose I would be capable of taking advantage of my position; but at least let me beg your forgiveness of the base, unmanly words that escaped me in the first stunning moment of astonishment and disappointment. I see that you were innocent—that I was entirely self-deceived! Marie! whether we part or not grant me pardon for this insult."

"It was cruel, very cruel," murmured Marie. "How could you doubt me? You could not had you really loved me."

"Man's love is a very different thing from woman's," returned Neville, grimly. "Yet, Marie, I loved and believed in you as I never loved or believed before, and never will again, sweetest, dearest wife! For you are my wife! for a few short hours we thought we were indissolubly linked—and now—" he paused. Marie, overcome by the memory of that brief day of happiness, of the tender embraces, the warm kisses to which she had yielded, crimsoned all over from her delicate throat to the roots of her wavy soft brown hair; and with a sudden, graceful gesture, a quick sob, covered her face with her hands. It was a silent confession, and Neville was keen to see and seize his advantage; yet

bold and resolute as he was, he feared to approach to startle her, though sharp thrills of passionate longing shivered through every vein. "Marie," he said, drawing slowly nearer, "is there no hope for me? can I never atone for the wounds I have inflicted? Look at me, dear, and you will see what torments I have lived through! had I not found you I should have been a wanderer all my days—a broken man! shall I be anything better if you turn from me now? Marie!" He managed gently to withdraw one hand from her face and take possession of it. "You loved me once, or you would not have married me. Is there no corner of your heart left for me now? Here, knowing the whole truth of your position, I pray you to be mine! only wishing I had a brighter lot to share with you—something worthier of you. Marie," growing bolder and drawing her to him, "I love you—and you know it—you must feel it. I will dare and endure everything for you and with you! Marie, sweetest love, you are my wife, and by Heaven! I will never let you go." By the time he had uttered these words she was locked in his arms, and, nearly fainting between strong emotion and the struggle for self-control, she lay against his breast, feeling with strange pity and tenderness the throbbing of his heart. "Speak to me," he resumed, almost in a whisper. "I thought I was strong enough to be generous,

but I am not ; you are mine, and I will keep you."

"Guy," said Marie, "let us try to be wise. I never loved any one but you,—I can never love any other,—but I have learned a better lesson ; I have lived without you, dear Guy,—and I *can* live without you,—(life is inexhaustible !)—but I could *not* exist with you and feel myself either tolerated or compassionated."

"Live without me !" interrupted Neville, "I believe you could ; for I believe there is more endurance and resolution in that slight frame of yours than in my six feet of muscular humanity ; but I tell you, my love, my life, you have no choice ; I am your husband and I will hold you fast ! Marie, you love me ? You must love me, or—"

She raised her eyes to his, and so—reason and wisdom and *prévoyance* were forgotten in one long thrilling kiss, so sweet, so tender, that all sorrow, and doubt, and dread seemed banished from this poor perplexed world for at least some blest seconds.

"Marie," said Neville, who still held her hand and indeed seemed unwilling to let her go for an instant, "you must put up your goods and chattels, and come away with me ; we have much to arrange, and I do not intend to let you out of my sight again."

"Then you must stay here," said Marie, who

was gradually recovering herself and becoming able to believe something of the great joy that flooded her life with its rising tide; "for I cannot leave Mr. Watson, your brother, till he is strong enough to be moved. Oh, Guy! think of all he has been to me! What would have become of me but for him?"

"Ay, indeed! his fatherly kindness to you has bound me to him for life. How is it that I never knew before what a good fellow he really is? I fancy you have wrought a miracle there, little witch! He thinks no end of you; he loves you, by Jove! like a daughter!"

Marie winced a little at this, and Guy went on. "By the way, I promised to take you to him as soon as we had made it up. He was far more sure about it than I was; I was awfully afraid you would cast me adrift; but you *do* love me, Marie?" Renewed assurances and proofs!

"Let us go to your brother, dear Guy; I feel ashamed of having forgotten him even for half an hour!"

"By Jove! I should be very much disgusted if you had not," cried Neville. "Come along then."

It was a solemn and awful undertaking to walk arm in arm with her lover-husband to the bedside of her benefactor, whose heart she well knew she had wrung with agony and sore conflict; but he was serene, and strong in faith and noble self-mastery.

"I see that all is well," he said, stretching out his hand to them, "I thank God it is so. May each of you be a help and comfort to the other!" He stopped, and Marie reverently and tenderly kissed the hand which held hers.

"Your goodness to Marie, your care of her in her sorrow and loneliness, has loaded me with a debt I never wish to wipe out," said Neville huskily. "Remember I hold myself at your service at all times and seasons."

"We shall be better friends in future," returned Mr. Watson. "But, Guy, you must spare me your wife until I am able to move to my own house, and then you must come with me—"

Sunny and swift fled the days that intervened. What charming stolen moments of private talk and secret kisses the married lovers enjoyed, learning to know each other better, love each other more! What rapturous letters came from Marie Delvigne, who declared that she would return to England at once to see her friend, even were she to travel alone.

How strange to Marie the respectful observance with which she was addressed as "Mrs. Neville;" for Mr. Watson cut short all talk and gossip by announcing that Marie was his brother's wife, separated in consequence of a slight misunderstanding, and now happily reunited.

How old Foster shook his head and shrugged

his shoulders over this new whim of "that strange fellow" Watson, may be imagined, and how Wheeler, getting scent of the true condition of things, applied to be re-engaged as lady's maid, with increased wages, on the plea of her devotion to her dear sweet lady!

Finally, the amazement of the Bushel family, on the eve of their exodus to Southampton,—the rejoicing, the triumph, the aphorisms, and religious ejaculations of Mrs. B.,—are quite beyond the power of this poor pen to describe.

The days passed quickly, as we have said, and at last the important move home again was permitted by the great surgeon. Here we leave Marie and her husband installed in Mr. Neville Watson's stately house as favored guests, delaying, at the master's request, the formation of all future plans till he was well enough to share their councils.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE only link wanting in this chain of happy circumstances was the presence of, or some communication from, Sir Frederic Compton.

When he had parted with Neville in Paris, he was in a state of depression and ill-humor very unusual with him. He was infinitely disgusted with himself for the series of blunders by which he imagined he had lost his cause with Miss Delvigne ; he was forever debating whether he should try to forget her or race across half Europe to overtake her in the Tyrol, and try his chance once more.

Being all at sea as to what to do with the rest of his leave, he joined some acquaintances who were going to have a look at Stockholm and some of the Norwegian fiords, and although he had sent Neville an address where letters might reach him, no answer came to his friend's announcement of his good fortune and happiness.

Marie suggested that he must be constantly moving about, and had forgotten to ask for letters ; but she was evidently anxious for tidings of him, and generally asked when letters

reached her husband, "Is there anything from Sir Frederic?"

Meantime Miss Delvigne besieged her guardian with entreaties to be brought back, that she might rejoice with her friend. But on this point Mr. Foster was undecided.

Of course all possible danger from Neville was over. Yet the benign old gentleman was a little puzzled what to do with his ward.

She absolutely refused to return to Miss Redoubt, and it was awkward and troublesome to look for a new abode, as her minority would terminate in six months, and he had hoped to get through that period, with Mrs. Coleman's help, partly by a prolonged tour in the north of Italy, partly by a visit to Saratoga Lodge.

A new difficulty had arisen to vex the venerable Foster. Mrs. Coleman's eldest son, a young Oxonian, threatened to join the travelling party—a tall, pale, interesting youth, in single-breasted coats, of æsthetic ideas, and picturesque piety, who wished to enter holy orders. In short, a most dangerous factor in the family combination. And all this time that provoking, yet beloved, and almost revered grandson, Sir Frederic Compton, had chosen to banish himself into inaccessible regions, where he was altogether out of the running. It was too contradictory. Perhaps, on the

whole, it would be as well for Marie Delvigne to return; yet it was troublesome and costly to send for her. He, Mr. Foster, could not expect any of the Coleman party to break their plans and disarrange their tour for his sake.

While he pondered these things in a very testy mood, as he sat alone after dinner one day about a week since the conclusion of our last chapter, his meditations were interrupted by a loud peal of the front door bell, which was followed, after a few minutes, by the opening of the dining-room door and the announcement by the solemn butler of "Miss Delvigne."

Mr. Foster started to his feet as his ward entered; his prominent feeling was relief that his doubts and hesitation were thus brought to an end.

"This is quite an unexpected pleasure, my dear! really astonishing! Why, how in the world have you managed, eh? and Mrs. Coleman, did she come with you?"

"No," replied Miss Delvigne, beginning to unfasten her travelling cloak, and smiling at her guardian's bewilderment. She was looking pale and worn, but seemed very composed and at her ease. "No, I have come with some very pleasant English people, with whom we have been travelling and making excursions, Lord and Lady Charles St. John. They were suddenly recalled to London, and as you had

never answered my last letter, I took silence for consent, and started with them. Mrs. Coleman had left us for a day or two to visit some shrine or place of pilgrimage with her son. He is tremendously high-church, quite in the steeple; so I just took my own consent, and here I am."

"But where did you find funds for so long and expensive a journey?" asked Mr. Foster, still bewildered.

"Oh! Lord Charles paid everything, and by the way, you must send him a check to-morrow. I suppose I may stay here? and I hope you are not angry."

"I confess you have taken my breath away; you young ladies are so emancipated nowadays. But you want refreshment. I will ring—"

"I should like a cup of tea," returned Miss Delvigne. "We had an early dinner at Canterbury; Lady Charles thought it a shame to have visited dozens of *doms* abroad, and pass by our own beautiful cathedral, so I am not at all hungry."

"Have you heard anything of Sir Frederic?" asked Mr. Foster, with much interest.

"Nothing whatever since we parted in Paris. We heard he had gone to Norway."

"A ridiculous expedition in my opinion," etc., etc., etc.

To Mr. Foster's surprise, and almost without volition on his part, his ward settled down as an inmate in his gloomy though luxurious house; nor did her presence incommode him in any way.

The greater part of her time was spent with her dear friend Mrs. Guy Neville. They helped each other in waiting on and petting Mr. Watson, and it must be confessed, in spoiling Guy. They enjoyed walking and shopping in the crisp autumnal days; they played over again their school duets, and made Neville laugh with their reminiscences of school politics. Still there was a slight pensive depression pervading Miss Delvigne's manner and strain of thought that puzzled her friend and made her uneasy.

Mr. Foster's first meeting with Marie was a source of triumph and laughter to his ward. The despised French teacher, so suddenly installed as mistress of his partner's house—a partner whose force of character made him considerably the old gentleman's master—met him on equal terms.

Mrs. Neville was in her favorite costume of black silk, and employed in writing once more to Sir Frederic Compton, and Miss Delvigne, looking very pale and depressed, sat beside her, pretending to work. The stiff solidity of a bachelor's drawing-room was somewhat toned down by the introduction of work-boxes, writing books, and belongings of Mrs. Neville.

Mr. Watson was propped in an easy-chair—the composure of exhaustion, rather than that of mind, stilling his gaunt, stern face.

When Mr. Foster was announced, Mrs. Neville rose to meet him with the calm self-possession of an assured position. The old gentleman felt bewildered at the change, but the simple good-breeding of Guy Neville's wife emphatically put him in his place.

He bowed, and took her hand with an attempted compliment, which she received with an indulgent smile; and then he occupied himself with his partner. But here he could not get rid of Marie; for if Mr. Watson wanted a paper, or a quotation from the prices current, or any kind of assistance, he invariably appealed to Mrs. Neville, as he always termed his young sister-in-law with fond respect.

All parties, by tacit consent, appeared to bury the past in oblivion, and even the future was not mentioned, partly because the present was so delicious, partly because the "iron-gray" brother must not be disturbed.

With the mental operations of this latter personage our story has not to do, though we would fain display them—an author, of course, being able to discern those conflicts which are (fortunately for the dignity of human nature) hidden from other eyes.

Neville Watson's battles with himself, how-

ever, would have done him no discredit, and though sorely shaken by the contest, he carried forth both sword and shield, while his whole nature seemed mellowed and purified by the storm that thus cleared his moral atmosphere.

"He has had a terrible shake," said old Mr. Foster, confidentially, to his head clerk; "never knew a man so altered—shouldn't be surprised now if he sank into a regular invalid, and fell completely into the hands of that little designing French woman."

Nevertheless, Neville Watson slowly gained strength.

Some days after the interview we have described, as Miss Delvigne and Marie Neville were sitting at luncheon, Sir Frederic Compton was most unexpectedly announced.

He entered with his usual frank, pleasant smile.

"Well, Mrs. Neville, I did not get Guy's letter till three weeks after it was written, and then I broke away from the fellows I was with; I longed to see and congratulate you; I travelled night and day, and here I am!"

"And why the deuce, then, did you go off on that Norwegian excursion," cried Neville, shaking the young Baronet's hand with hearty cordiality; "I never knew such a fellow!"

"Miss Delvigne!" exclaimed Sir Frederic,

coloring; "I did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing *you* here."

"If you prefer it, I'll go away," she returned, with such undisguised petulance that both Neville and Marie burst out laughing, and Sir Frederic, visibly brightening, began an elaborate explanation.

"You must be considerably stupefied by your Scandinavian rambles, my dear fellow," interrupted Neville, "if you did not know the very most likely place to find Miss Delvigne was with us."

Sir Frederic laughed, hesitated, and then said:

"Well, if I were not afraid to say so, perhaps I did."

"How did you like Sweden?" asked Miss Delvigne, quickly; and after a little vague talk she left the room.

"Ah, Neville!" cried Sir Frederic; "what an unlucky fellow I am! you see she can't bear me, and I—I am wild about her. Isn't it too bad? and I protest there are lots of girls would think me a nice young man enough," he concluded, with a rueful kind of laugh. "Do you think, Mrs. Neville, she will ever come round?"

"Oh! I would not offer an opinion," returned Marie, demurely. "Why do you not ask her yourself?"

"So I did once. Yet, stay! No, I didn't. I said she must be disgusted with me, or something to that effect, and she did not contradict me."

"Pooh, man," cried Neville; "don't be so easily put off! Go now; I dare say she is in the drawing-room alone. Ask her straightforward, and put an end to all uncertainties."

"It's a tremendous effort, eh? Give me the sherry!"

He drained a bumper, exclaiming, "Here's success!" and hastily left the room.

"I trust it will all go right," said Mrs. Neville to her husband, anxiously; "but she is a little peculiar."

"Everything goes right now," replied Neville fondly.

Some half an hour after Mr. Foster arrived to see Mr. Watson, and having exchanged salutations with Captain and Mrs. Neville, expressed a wish to speak to the former on his descent from his partner's room. Marie and Neville, therefore, waited very patiently, and at length the old gentleman came in, with a portentous expression of countenance, and began an harangue somewhat solemnly:

"Captain Neville, your brother has been making a proposition to me, about which, before I entertain it, I should like to have some conversation with you."

Here the door opened, and enter Sir Frederic Compton, triumphantly, radiant, leading the young heiress, who, though a tear glistened on her long eyelashes, looked demurely pleased.

"What! you here, my dear sir?" cried Sir Frederic. "Just in time. Here is your dutiful ward, and your equally obedient grandson, come to beg your blessing. Neville! dear old boy! I am the happiest fellow in existence. Miss Delvigne—my dear Marie—has deigned to forgive and overlook all my mistakes, and take me for better, for worse!"

"Eh! God bless my soul! my dear boy, you don't say so. Come here, my child,"—to Miss Delvigne—"God bless you. Bless *me*, I thought you had gone off to Norway at a tangent; and it's all right now; no more fear of mistakes?"

"No fear of anything! But, my dear granddad, you've a promise to fulfil. You promised that the day I was married to Miss Delvigne, you'd take Neville into the bank as a partner; and Miss Delvigne, for friendship's sake, will fix the early day."

"Not so fast, Fred. But, as I did say something about the matter, and my partner has espoused your view of the case, I will tell what I *do* agree to; that, if on making himself acquainted with the routine of the business, Captain Neville would like to become a banker, he shall be a junior partner, Mr. Neville Watson

placing £10,000 as Mrs. Neville's fortune, in *the concern*. Eh, Fred?"

Up with the curtain for the last *tableau*.

A tastefully-furnished dining-room in Captain, now Mr. Neville's, elegant though unassuming villa, in the new and improving neighborhood of Notting Hill; the table is spread with fruit and flowers, and Sir Frederic and Lady Compton, and Mr. Neville Watson, are the guests of our old friends.

It is June, some six years after the close of our last scene; the perfume of mignonette and clematis comes through the open French windows.

The "iron-gray man," considerably grayer than when we first saw him, holds a little fair-haired girl of three years old on his knee—a tiny graceful thing, with lustrous, beseeching, dark eyes—wondrously dark, to be accompanied by such fair locks; and she plays with his watch-chain, and clings to him with undefinable, sympathetic love, which nothing can imitate or explain. a:

"Dear uncle," said Mrs. Guy Neville, who looking handsomer than ever, "we must not +, you spoil that little one so much."

The uncle only replied by pressing a kiss on the little head, every fair curl of which was dearer to him than all the wealth in the coffers of Foster and Co.

"My little Marie will spoil uncky by and by, when he is a weak old man—which will be soon, Compton," he added—"for since your grandfather's death, I have felt the business too much for me; but I have a good successor. I never thought that an ex-dragoon would make so wide-awake a banker, Guy!"

"That metamorphose is due to you, Mrs. Neville," said Sir Frederic.

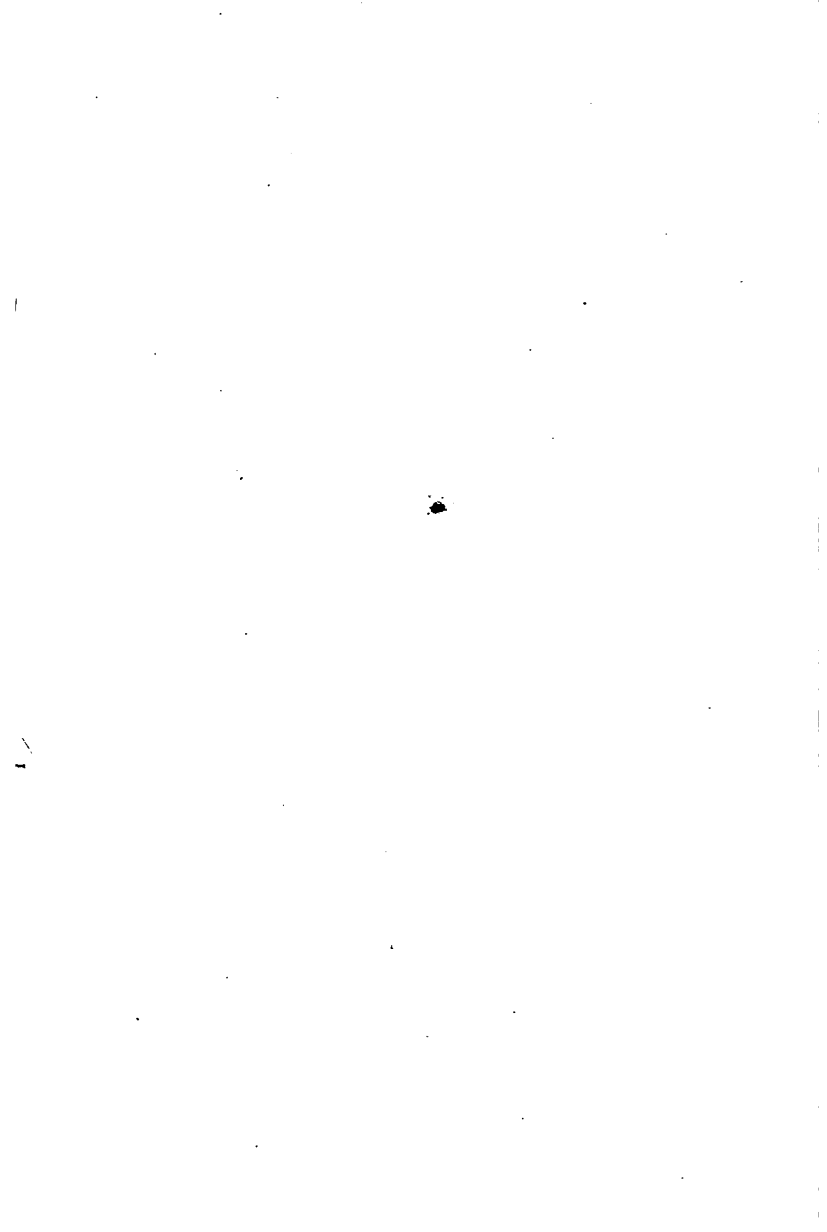
"What a row they are making," said Guy, rising to look at a couple of children, who, with their attendants, were making the garden ring with shouts of glee—one a large-boned, blue-eyed, tawny-haired boy of about five, was rolling a slight, active, black-haired imp, a year younger than himself, over and over on the grass, in spite of the exertions of a dignified nurse.

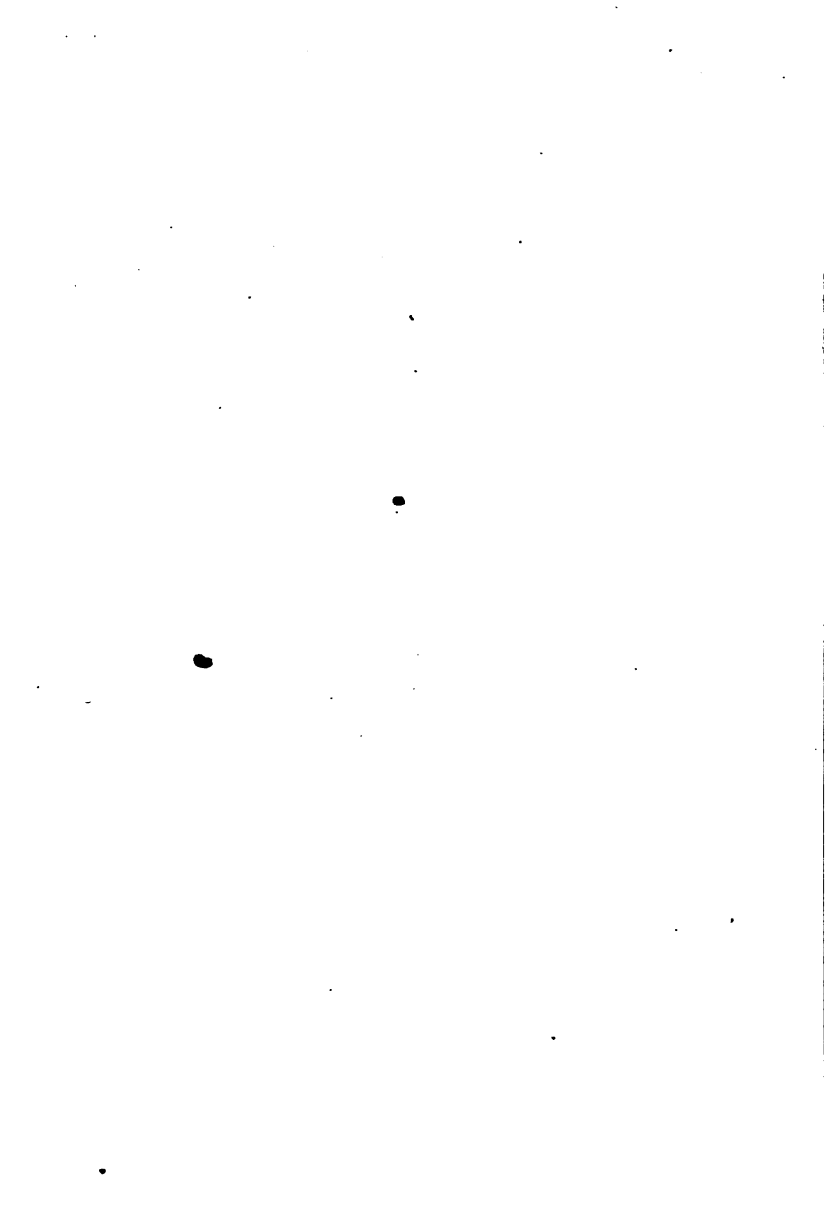
"I hope they will always be friends," said Lady Compton, who had grown softer and more sentimental since her marriage.

"He is too much for your little fellow, Lady Compton," said Neville, laughing, "I must teach him fair play."

"Better still, dear Guy," said Marie slyly—"Teach him 'to look before he leaps!'"

THE END.









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